

Spring 1951

May Williams Ward: Kansas Poet

Irene Suran
Fort Hays Kansas State College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Suran, Irene, "May Williams Ward: Kansas Poet" (1951). *Master's Theses*. 482.
<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/482>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

MAY WILLIAMS WARD: KANSAS POET

being

A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays Kansas State College in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

Irene Suran (Mrs. Cade) A. B.

Kansas Wesleyan University

Date

May 16, 1951

Approved

Ralph J. Coder

Major Professor

Ralph J. Coder

Chairman Graduate Council

To my husband Cade
and
my daughters Sue and Kay
for their cooperation
which made the preparation
of this study
possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer of this thesis wishes to acknowledge the invaluable help and encouragement offered by May Williams Ward, the subject of this study; the forthright and constructive criticisms offered by Dr. Ralph Coder and Miss Roberta Stout of the English Department; the willing efforts of Dr. F. B. Streeter, Librarian, in securing information needed for the study; and the understanding consideration given by Dr. Robert T. McGrath of the Education Department in course work preparatory to the undertaking of the study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	
Reputation of the poet	1
Poetic themes.	2
Collection of data	3
Personality of poet.	5
Poetic theories.	5
Publications of poet	6
II. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA	
Childhood and early background	7
Education and early writing.	9
Teaching experience.	14
Marriage	15
Beginning of <u>w</u> riting career.	15
Literary activities.	17
Writing career	22
Lecturer	25
Prose writing.	27
Recent publications and preparations for publication . .	28
III. POETRY OF MAY WILLIAMS WARD	
Poetic theories.	30
Style analysis	43
Do's and Don'ts for young writers.	51
Summary of style characteristics	53

CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. RECOGNITION AS A POET	
Her poetry and Kansas.	55
Popularity outside Kansas.	62
National recognition	65
Treatment by critics	66
Letters.	73
Summary.	76
V. CONCLUSION	
Evidence of recognition in Kansas.	77
Evidence of recognition outside Kansas	79
Summary.	81
Lyrical quality of May Williams Ward's poetry.	82
Influences on writing.	83
May Williams Ward's philosophy of life	84
Summary.	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86

INDEX TO POEMS

POEM	PAGE
 CHAPTER I	
Garden Wedding	1,2
I Have Written	5
 CHAPTER II	
Far Away in Ancient Egypt.	9
Semblance of Equality.	10
Red Hat.	11
Gifts.	14
Night in a Prairie Town.	15
Youth Wants Summer.. . . .	16
In a Cell.	18
Two Flowers for My Mother.	20
In the Next Room.	20
Seesaw	22
From Christmas Time to April	24
Song of Midnight	26
 CHAPTER III	
My House Is Small.	31
My Little Sister	31
The Proof.	32
Rise Like the Flood You Are.	33
Dictator by a Dark Pool.	33
This is a Strange Night.	34

POEM

PAGE

The Tree and I	36
Wind and Women	36
Art Note	37
My Cousin Cynthia Says	37
In That Day.	38
The Tower.	42
Rose Tree and Redbirds	42
Tree Cut Down.	43
Christmas Legend	44
To Know Words.	45
I Like Winter.	45
Partly a Sadness	46
The Cynic.	47
Overcoats.	47
Questions.	48
Psycho-Analyst	48
Anthology.	48
I Apprehended Petals	50

CHAPTER IV

Structural	55
Sky-Mountain	55
Spring Day in Kansas	56
Wet Summer	56
The Shower	57
Glory Mountain	57

POEM

PAGE

In Time of Drought	58
John Brown and the Cabin	58
Pioneer.	58
Experience	59
Alien.	59
Selections from a Sequence, DUST BOWL.	60
In Tornado Country	60
Tornado.	61
The Undiminished	63
Ironing.	64
I Remember	66
Variously.	67
Book-Smart	67
The Best Housekeeper in Town	68
The Heirloom	68
The Optomist	69
Genius	69
Of Poetry.	70
Back Home.	70
Decrescendo.	71
Let Us Sit Near.	71
Soldier's Return, 1918	72
Words After a Peace.	73
Reproach to a Tree	73
Adolescence.	75

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The name of May Williams Ward is synonymous with the growth of interest in poetry in the State of Kansas, for she has been writing here for thirty years. It has been the privilege of the writer of this thesis to be counted among the friends of Mrs. Ward during the last of these decades, when settings and themes other than Kansas and its people have appeared frequently in her work. She has taken thought of war and the world and evaluation of individuals known or imagined as themes of poetry. Yet in research through the whole body of her work, especially that of the twenties and thirties, the Kansas influence is found not only to be marked, but dominant; and in the last decade, too, it is a fundamental theme on which her whole philosophy is based.

Long considered one of the foremost poets of Kansas, Mrs. Ward has gained prominence in the United States and recognition in England. Acceptance has come because of her ability to see the potentialities in everyday circumstances and persons. As a person, M.W.W. is many-sided, with normal interests and hobbies, but with perhaps a more than normal understanding of people. She has no children, but in such a poem as "Garden Wedding" she expresses an emotion many parents have, and the setting might be almost anywhere in America.

GARDEN WEDDING

Lilies float their fragrance over the arbor.
From the wine-glass elm is poured a wavering, wide
Pool of shadow. Lilacs jewel the border

With silver hearts for leaves on the moonward side.
 Violins from the brookside terrace are sending
 Quivering notes over quivering water flowing
 Scarcely breaking the stillness. But there is thunder
 Rolling in hearts of the parents. . . thunder of
 knowing
 That the child of this home, this garden, this love,
 this pride
 Is child no more. They are coming, bridegroom and
 bride.

Too, this poem is quoted because, indirectly, it influenced the choice of subject for this thesis. When invited by Dr. Ralph Coder to speak before the students of the English Department of Fort Hays Kansas State College, of which he is the Head, Mrs. Ward chose "Garden Wedding" for detailed analysis of the stages of development in a poem. Her talk increased the enthusiasm which Dr. Coder has had for Midwestern Poets since coming to Kansas, and so he encouraged the choice of Mrs. Ward, who is a representative poet of this area, and her work as a subject for a thesis study.

M.W.W. writes of war and the end of the world as well as of garden weddings; yet her unflagging enthusiasm is for Kansas as a source of poetic themes. She says in her foreword to Kansas Poets:

If any Kansan writes verse that is limited in outlook, it is not the fault of our sky; if pettiness shows, it is not the fault of our winds. Blatant color could not truly reflect the aspect of the plain, no conventional characterization indicate the flavor of her people. . . .¹

And again, in Prairies and Poets she says:

. . .The prairie is paradoxical. With her expansiveness there is reticence: the apparently level carpet conceals nests. Her

1. The North America Book of Verse (New York: Henry Harrison, 1939), Kansas Section, ed. Edna Becker.

poets should have simplicity, yet quiver with wings not seen. Her varied stimuli should find them responsive so that they shall have great desire and great creative impulses beautifully bodied in rhythm.²

The libraries of Kansas and other states furnished material, but more revealing were the numerous clippings which she has collected concerning herself, her friends, and her poetry. Some from the early years of writing are neatly pasted in large scrapbooks; some are still in fat filing boxes, gathering dust on the shelves. Mrs. Ward's orderliness, strict logic, and discipline in construction of verses is astoundingly contradicted in the way she keeps her scrapbooks and clippings. There are years when she saved nothing at all. Since she has never subscribed to a clipping bureau, her scrapbooks are either very full or contain nothing at all. One of her most interesting collections is that of her "fan mail." In these she says she has enjoyed the "persimmons of criticism along with the peaches of praise."³ To all these Mrs. Ward gave free access, an opportunity which has proved invaluable in supplementing research in various libraries for the collection of data for the problem under consideration in this thesis: May Williams Ward: Kansas Poet. This study of the poet May Williams Ward is an attempt to trace the life pattern of the poet as well as to make a critical study of the writing and lecturing she has done, and seeks to evaluate the place of prominence she holds

2. May Williams Ward, "Prairies and Poets," Community Arts and Crafts Magazine, LI(February, 1928), 14, 19.

3. Personal Interview.

in the nation as well as in Kansas. No other study has been prepared on the problem selected for this thesis.

Notes toward an autobiography also threw light on her background and training, and its tone between the lines helped to evaluate the poetic ability and achievement of Mrs. Ward. Written in an informal style, it reflects her simplicity of manner, directness of thought and insight, and her sense of the humorous. In no way temperamental, she is delightfully feminine and has radiated a deeply human sympathy and awareness for others throughout her life. An eighth-grade girl once remarked to her at the end of a poetry talk, "Why, Mrs. Ward, you look like anybody else all over--except your face--and it looks kind of like a poet!"⁴

One of the most pleasurable aspects of the preparation of this study has been the opportunity to hear Mrs. Ward, usually so reticent about her own accomplishments, talk about her poetry and all the human contacts it has brought to her life. Enthusiasm mounted as the recall of one thing led to another and bits of information came to light here and there, perhaps in the dark corner of a seldom used drawer, tucked away in a book in the bookshelves, or lost in the boxes of yellowed clippings which had been saved for that time of scrapbook pasting that never materialized.

The versatility of her personality is evidenced in the wide scope of her interests outside of poetry construction. Prose articles have reflected the philosophy and ideas expressed more subtly in her

4. Personal Interview.

poems. Poetry writing has been done with more painful effort, she says, and gives her idea of the two more fully in the poem "I Have Written," published in Muse and Mirror, April, 1926.

I HAVE WRITTEN

A thousand fluent pages of prose--
 Fingertip feelings of surfaces,
 Machinery taken apart.
 And--
 Seven meager poems
 Reluctantly, painfully,
 Pinched from the flesh of my heart.

This poem also illustrates what liars poets are, M.W.W. says, for, of course, she has written many more poems than prose, but the greater pinching of the heart is authentic. She has several hobbies, all of which again exhibit her interest in people. A melodian from her father's home in Naples, New York, holds a place of prominence in her living room. Desserts may be served in the antique glass butter dishes which she has collected, the men eating from a Lincoln drape, bow-tie, or Westward Ho pattern, while the women are more delighted with the daisy and button or other patterns "in the books." A source of pride to the poet are her collections of original art by Kansans such as Birger Sandzen and about two hundred autographed books of authors she has met, such as Sara Teasdale, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edward Arlington Robinson, DuBose Heyward, William Allen White, and Jesse Stuart. Above all, people are her hobby, especially young people who are trying to be poets.

The writer has attempted to learn the poetic theories of May Williams Ward through listening to her reading of her own poetry, her explanation of the rhythmic plan of her poetry, and through the writing

Mrs. Ward has done concerning the art of poetry writing and poetry reading. To augment these conclusions, an investigation was made of reviews and comments about her and her poems, and inquiries were made of her friends and associates for literary and personal notes.

Mrs. Ward has been a prolific writer in the thirty years since her first poem appeared in print. Nearly a thousand verses have since been published, in more than a hundred magazines, as well as four books: Seesaw, In Double Rhythm, From Christmas Time to April, and Approach to Social Studies Through Choral Reading. This last book contains more than a hundred poems for children by Mrs. Ward and her co-author on this volume, Dorothy Harvel. Mrs. Ward is now arranging and selecting poems for another book under the title Wheatlands, to be published within a year. For the purpose of a study of Mrs. Ward's poetry in this thesis, representative poems of the poet in which different phases of her style and thought are apparent have been scattered through the chapters.

An attempt has been made to evaluate the literary standing of May Williams Ward in Kansas and outside of Kansas by discovering the extent of her publications and popularity, the recognition she has gained, the honors she has received, and the treatment accorded her by the critics.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

May Williams Ward, one of the foremost poets of Kansas and a nationally known writer and lecturer, was born January 26, 1882, in Holden, Missouri. She was the daughter of George Washington Williams, who was born in Naples, New York, January 30, 1856, and Sara Minnie Smith Williams, who was born in Osawatomie, Kansas, July 29, 1858.

The name Williams betrays the Welsh origin of May's father. There is said to be English-Welsh-German blood further back before American migration. He was never too busy to take time to satisfy the inquisitiveness of a child's mind. The poet's awareness of pattern in the arts goes back to her father's observation to her as a child that there were never any two things alike. He showed her honeysuckle vines with each leaf different, measured fence pickets with a steel tape to discover almost invisible variations in thickness of wood and paint, and most of all, showed her the constant difference in the faces of people. This close look at all persons has brought pleasure to the poet all her life.

Before the advent of the other children in the family, May enjoyed rare and unshared companionship with her father, who contracted to build bridges for the expanding Missouri Pacific railroad lines. Singing in a lusty baritone and trotting her upon his knee, he gave to May her first sense of consciously enjoyed rhythm. Hearing the reading of poetic chapters of the Bible each morning by her father was one of the biggest influences in the poet's gaining a sense of rhythm

as she grew older. Too, swinging on the gate in the picket fence when she was a child made her feel like a poet, though she had never heard of the word.

I felt creation of poetry through my stubby toe pushing to make the gate keep going. In and out with a gentle, dizzying sway as the motion was separated into parts by a pause with a sense of climax, then reversal, return, and repetition. Are not poems made like that, using fundamental motion, engineered by the creative toe of the poet?¹

The quiet voice, matter-of-fact ways, and serene spirit of May's mother instilled confidence in all her children through the years. She was ahead of her time in her frank outlook on life and her discussion of problems with her children. Listening to her mother chant "Paul Revere's Ride" remains as a vivid memory to the poet.

May probably received a heritage of glibness from her maternal grandfather, Captain Rueben Smith, a self-educated man who was a member of the first legislature of Kansas. Rueben Smith and his wife had both emigrated from Manchester, England, but did not meet until they were in America, where they were married when in their teens. He gained the title of Captain during Civil War days. Captain Smith's home was in Osawatomie, a town just over the border from Missouri and the seat of some of the most exciting early history of the state. The diaries which he kept of the events of these early days hold a hint of the writing talent which he had. May as a child read avidly in the classics from the library of her grandfather. She remembers particularly the uncensored Arabian Nights, Scott, Trollope, Swift,

1. Autobiographical Notes.

Milton, Thackeray, Pope, Shakespeare, and Poe. The poet feels that the piece of weaving in a horseshoe pattern which her grandfather fashioned as a child has been an omen of good luck to her and still has it in her possession.

May's sister Creta was born while the home was still in Holden. Creta's merriment, her spontaneous singing, and her solid domestic virtues have always helped May to find a joy in living. To this day she finds and sends clippings concerning the accomplishments of her poetic sister. When May was seven, the family moved from Holden, Missouri, to Osawatomie, over in Kansas, where her father worked as Superintendent of the Missouri Pacific Woodworking Shop, now that his bridge building contracts were completed. The first son of the family, Fay, was born soon, but lived but a short time. May's mother had let the girls share in the family grief, thus preparing her children for life and death, meanwhile explaining as best she could, unemotionally, that it is the impact of events on inner life which is important, not the events themselves.

Before the poet was ten, she had written her first poem, in which she says everything was wrong: people, places, and time of which she knew nothing; cliches; inversions; pseudo-heroic manner; and stilted language. The first lines in rhythm imitative of "Hiawatha" ran in this manner:

Far away in ancient Egypt
Ere the pyramids were builded
Lived a maiden and her lover
Separated by the desert.

At this time, too, a five-cent notebook began a companionship of

several years with the poet. Within its covers strutted many heroes and heroines, launched on short-lived careers. At eleven years of age, May was writing the grade school notes for the local newspaper.

About the time that May first felt poetic urges, her sister Lois arrived to comfort the family for the loss of Fay. Although nine years separate May and Lois in age, they have always been very close to each other. Their personalities and artistic temperaments are akin. Lois has a neatness in her cupboards and bureau drawers admired by May and emulated not at all in physical details, but perhaps in the neat, finished effect which she seeks in verse-making.

Happy were the sisters when their brother Stanley arrived to grow up the only boy in a family of girls, for the stay of their sister Gladys with the family had been brief. He was a reminder of Fay but was much more vital. His love for children probably influenced the poet in the writing of her light verses and child verses. Stanley served in World War I and was once left for dead on the battlefield, but recovered. M.W.W.'s many war poems stem partly from his experiences, partly from her Grandfather Smith's, and more recently, from those of several nephews serving in World War II. She has a poem called "Semblance of Equality," in which she says:

SEMBLANCE OF EQUALITY

In war the sage philosopher
 The common man
 And many fools
 Are on one level;
 An equality only a semblance still.
 But death can make it real.

In the Kansas City Star, about 1940, was printed "Red Hat." Below it

is quoted an unpublished variant version, written in 1951.

RED HAT

Today my best beloved
Went to war.
I bought a new red hat.

What for?
--(1940)

The boys of our town have been going away
by ones and twos
now more and more
going to war.
Not theirs or mine to ask or choose
why peace or war.

I bought a new red hat today.
What for?

--(1951)

By the time that May was ready for high school, the family had moved, first living on a rented farm and later on one of their own. Everything there was interesting--plowing and planting, haying, butchering, picking vegetables, wild strawberries and hazelnuts. The times when the threshing crews worked and ate at the farm home, the country parties with their running games and kissing games and singing after spelling bees, the socials and literaries--all these increased awareness in the poet of people and their emotions. Memories of days which the children spent out-of-doors in the yard and hay-loft and little grove of trees nearby playing make-believe continued stories recall the sight of great trees, the scent of lilacs, honeysuckle, peonies, mint, and roses and the mingling of the colors of flowers in season. A sense of being a part of the beauties and harmonies of nature became an integral part of the personality of the poet even in childhood.

When writing the "Athenian Notes" for the High School Magazine, May made use of big words and attempted humor along with reporting. It was during this period that she was so much influenced by her Grandfather Smith, the Englishman voluable and uninhibited, who kept diaries with peppery comments on fellow politicians and bigwigs while he was a member of the Kansas legislature. Too, she read the letters which he sent back from his trip to England, enjoying the more realistic details which her mother had omitted in reading them to the family. She was grateful to her grandfather for his insistence that she be allowed to read everything which piqued her interest--even Rabelais.

Memories of the content of her valedictorian oration to which she gave the fancy title, "Our Palladium," are not nearly so vivid to the poet as those of the airy white organdy and the violet-and-pink sprigged voile dresses and a lacy fan, which saw her through the gay senior activities and later went dancing with her in college. To these, for entrance in the University, were added a new winter coat, three new shirtwaists, and a fine wool dress, plus major additions in the underwear and stocking department, for May's mama considered plenty of these to be the mark of a lady.

College days were never long enough for May. Eager always to absorb the pages of a book, she had no trouble with curricular subjects, making good grades and eventually Phi Beta Kappa. But it was the things outside that enriched life even more for the girl from a small town--the choice music, the art collections, the great library, contacts with the fine minds of top men in different fields. She earned no credits for attending the Saturday art classes under William Griffith,

the painter who later helped make famous the art communities of Carmel and La Jolla, California. The now valuable Ward collection of originals by midwest artists is traceable to these college interests. Visits to the home of William Herbert Carruth, author of Each in His Own Tongue, came about because of the poet's friendship with his daughter Constance. Discussions of the elders causing books to be brought down from the high bookshelves, reminiscent talk about European trips, admiration of other visitors for the antique treasures in the home all lifted the level of her tastes and caused her to regret that Grandma Williams's spool bed had been chopped up for kindling.

Picnics, sled riding down Mount Oread, chapel-cutting dates, dancing, dates to walk in the rain and talk of books all took on an aspect of insignificance when Merle Ward appeared on the campus. Because of illness, he did not come to K. U. until two years after his classmates from Wellington, Kansas, and so was a Freshman when May was a Junior. By Christmas, Merle had edged out two or three other boys and was May's escort to the dances on the Hill and downtown, with oyster stew afterwards at Weidermann's, and on the walk home with the dancing slippers dangling in a "party bag."

It was in this happy time of her life that May began thinking again of her father's maxim, that no two persons are alike. She felt that, in general, she belonged to the classification called artistic. Although it was several years before she actually wrote anything, she was fully aware of her personality as a poet. The incomplete piece which she wrote at this time, half in outline, half in free verse, will perhaps be an autobiography sometime, she says.

College years brought three super things to the poet--the twins, Vivian and Lilian, who entered the family when May was in college and Stanley was seven; awareness of what sort of person she was; and Merle. The twins were like children to May, rather than sisters, for they were so much younger than she. A whole book of children's poems and many uncollected are authentic in child psychology because of them, and of the nieces and nephews who kept coming along to the family. Merle, from first acquaintance on through the years, has always been first in importance to May. The cherished companionship of these two is a rare thing. All her poems are dedicated to her husband. No wonder M.W.W. has written many tender love poems such as "Gifts." It is a subtle poem in thought, and its rhythm and uneven lines are interesting technically.

GIFTS

I have had lovers and would-be lovers.
 One brought burning lips;
 One, a restlessness such as hovers
 Over ships;
 One brought a whirlwind of merrymaking;
 (For a little I might have been his for the taking,
 Not for long)--
 All were disturbing gifts--even the singing--
 And not a giver guessed
 I shall be won by a lover bringing
 Only rest. . . .

In 1905, May was graduated from Kansas University, and Merle decided to terminate his college career after two years. He worked for the Arkansas City, Kansas mill while May taught school in her home town the first year after they left college, but Merle was able to wangle a place for her in the high school of Arkansas City the next year so they could be together once more while they built up the

get-married fund.

On January 7, 1907, May and Merle were married in the little stone church in Osawatomie, which John Brown had helped to build. John Brown's grandniece Grace Adair played the organ, the twins were flower girls, and Creta was bridesmaid. The poet's mother had used her finest stitches inserting the Princess lace which adorned the dress of the bride, Lois and her friends had filled the deep walnut sills with hundreds of candles, and the father of the bride gave her away. In the poetic words of M.W.W., "There was a light flurry of snow to frost the happy evening like a wedding cake."² They journeyed to Lamar, Colorado, where they bought a little house and made their first home. Merle was starting as bookkeeper for the Lamar Mill, belonging to the great Colorado Mill and Elevator Co. Later, during World War I, he advanced to the position of manager.

As a bride, Mrs. Ward joined the Round Table Club at Lamar. She has great respect for women's clubs and has always been a willing contributor to their programs. It was because of the persuasion of Colorado clubwomen that she began writing. In 1920, although skeptical of her power, she agreed to enter a poem, "Night in a Prairie Town," in a poetry contest sponsored by the Colorado Federated Women's Clubs. In this poem she says:

NIGHT IN A PRAIRIE TOWN

We live in a bare little town on the plain
Yet we have a tree or two,

And even a cottonwood's leaves are lace
At night when the moon shines through.

We live in a dry little town on the plain
No marshes dewy and damp,
Yet at night there's a hint of the will-o-
the-wisp
In each twinkling auto lamp.

We live in a hot little town on the plain
Summer days are a blaze of light,
But a velvet sky with close-hung stars
And a cool breeze, comes with the night.

The church in our good little town on the plain
Has pillars of drab cement,
Night turns them to marble of classic mold
'Neath a Grecian pediment.

Our home in the faraway town on the plain
Lacks many things, it is true,
But it's home of my heart when the day's work
is done
And night, O my darling, brings you.

Winning second prize, which was an anthology of modern poetry that opened her eyes to new trends, she was encouraged to write two more verses and mail them to Life Magazine, then a humor periodical. A quatrain, "Youth Wants Summer," was accepted and published in February, 1921. It occupied the page one position with an illustration. M.W.W. says the \$5.00 check she received looked bigger to her than any that have come her way since. The poem runs thus:

YOUTH WANTS SUMMER

Youth wants summer and a sweetheart and the moon
And flowers and a fine new gown, forsooth,
And music and excitement and to win tomorrow's
game. . .
Age wants -- Youth.

We find here an emotion genuinely felt by many, in acceptable form and with progress to a climax, even though there is no subtlety and

the language is ordinary.

Her newfound interest in moderns led to a conversation with Nelson Antrim Crawford, now Editor of Household Magazine at Topeka. He lent to her many volumes of British and American moderns from his own library. Well-versed in traditional poetry, she read eagerly even the extremists among the imagists and tried to get away from her trend toward Victorian phraseology. At first, Mrs. Ward paid little attention to verse forms. Later, she found help in Robert Graves's "On English Poetry," and W. H. Carruth's "Verse Forms," and other technical books.

Merle's work now took them back to the State of Kansas, where they made their home first at Spearville, then in Belpre, where Merle entered the grain business for himself. Living with the stark winter spaces of the Kansas prairies, gazing over the billowing seas of green springtime fields, and mingling with people close to the earth influenced the poet's expression of fancy and imagery and left a deep imprint of ideas for poetic content. During these years she began to build up an acceptance record which is enviable. After five years of writing, she was the autho of more than three hundred poems and had appeared in thirty-five magazines.

In 1925, the poet was accorded one of the highest honors offered to a writer. Sponsored by Cora G. Lewis and William Allen White, Kansas newspaper people, by letters to their friend Mrs. Edward MacDowell, widow of the famous composer, Mrs. Ward was invited to attend the MacDowell Colony. At that time, only about twenty-five people, representing the seven arts, were invited to the colony each year. May

Williams Ward was one of four Kansans who had been so honored. The others were Professor Charles S. Skilton of Kansas University, composer of note; Margaret Lynn, also of Lawrence, author of Stepdaughter of the Prairie and Free Soil, and editor of Eighteenth Century Verse; and Willard Wattles, Wichita poet.³ During the month she spent at Peterborough, New Hampshire, she shared in talk of creative ideas with such writers as Sara Teasdale, Edwin Arlington Robinson, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward of Porgy and Bess fame, Stephen Vincent Benet, and the now very famous composer, Roy Harris. After a spirited conversation concerning the plot of the play the Heywards were writing, Mrs. Ward wrote the poem "In a Cell."

IN A CELL

I had steeled myself to dream
 Of the blow, of the cry,
 Of the terror if footsteps paused
 In passing by;
 But how could I guess I should dream
 Of scouring the knife
 And putting it back in its place,
 Where the dead man's wife,
 After the time of shock,
 When she must eat,
 Takes it to cut her daily
 Bread and meat?

This poem was later published in The Bookman, in 1927. Another produced at this time was "The Dying Fall," later called "Decrescendo," of which Mrs. Ward says, . . . "it is really mysterious to me--the enigma of why the decrescendo in nature can be beautiful, but in human life

3. Victoria Unruh Harvey, "Achievements of Mrs. Ward Marked by Versatility," The St. Louis Star, August, 1927.

be often unlovely and resented."⁴ This poem is quoted in a later chapter. From the sheaf of poems she wrote in the Mansfield studio, the poet gained entrance to such magazines as Poetry, Commonweal, Forum, Child Life, and the like for the first time. Since her return home, she has been active in benefits for the MacDowell Colony. The latest was given in Kansas City, Kansas, where she read a group of poems, and school children gave a recital of choral readings from her book, Approach to Social Studies Through Choral Reading.

As the years passed, Lois married her childhood sweetheart soon after their high school days. Their son, Bob McConnell, was the first grandchild in the Williams family, and was followed by two other children. Creta, too, had married a home town boy, Fred Hill, a former newspaperman who was then purchasing agent for the Guggenheim interests in Chile. Creta and Fred were parents of three children, too, before tragedy struck in both families.

Death has been a frequent theme of Mrs. Ward's poems. Family tragedies may account for this emotional reaction. Losing their mother was hard for the Williams family, for she was only middle-aged, not old. Yet they had been prepared in their early lives by their mother herself to feel that death was natural and inevitable. "Two Flowers for My Mother," written many years later, is the poet's tribute to her mother's memory.

4. Personal Interview.

TWO FLOWERS FOR MY MOTHER

There in the valley, her body;
 Here in my face, her eyes;
 Under my skull-bones ever
 A coil of her live thought lies.
 The way I drop meal in water,
 Delicately and slow,
 Is the way she taught me, and even
 The slant of the stitch when I sew.
 In my own voice chanting a poem
 I hear her voice sometimes,
 And her joy in marching rhythms
 Marches with joy in my rhymes.

There in the valley, her body.
 Far in eternity's light,
 Her soul. For them I am wearing
 This pale pure flower of white.
 But for part of her, vital, growing
 In the self of myself, instead,
 I wear for my mother this glowing
 Rich lustrous rose of red.

Soon Death entered the family again. Creta, her husband, and three children had spent a happy vacation in the States and were ready to take the boat trip back to South America when Creta's husband was killed in an automobile accident. With three children and another on the way, Creta faced problems that saddened her family many times. May and Merle, who unfortunately had no children of their own, wished to take the posthumous baby, Mary Lu, for their own, but Creta could not part with her. Soon death struck for the third time, tragically. Lois lost her husband and six-year-old son Dickie in a drowning accident. In the poem "In the Next Room," Mrs. Ward expresses a poignant understanding for her sisters in their widowhood.

IN THE NEXT ROOM

In the next room
 In the low chair

In the soft dark
Are you there?

I do not ask it
When sun is laid
Through the checkered
 windows
In yellow plaid---

Then, love of the past
Seems rich enough
And having had that
I can give you up.

But in the deep dark
In the low chair
In the next room
Are you there?

I want you there.

In 1926, Mrs. Ward assumed the editorship of The Harp, a national poetry magazine published by Sara and Leslie Wallace at Larned, Kansas. William Allen White once termed this bi-monthly publication "the loveliest adventure in Kansas."⁵ The balanced selection of poems in each issue is evidence of the discrimination which is characteristic of Mrs. Ward as a critic. A poem by Amy Lowell appeared in the first number. In the course of her six years as editor, there appeared in issues of The Harp such notables as Edward Arlington Robinson, John Farrar, Louise Bogan, as well as many other nationally known poets, and any Kansas poet writing distinctive verse at the time. Among the patrons of the magazine who aided in its support were William Allen White, Arthur Capper, Jouett Shouse, and Frank Motz. A victim of the serious flu epidemic of the '30's, Mrs. Ward was forced to give up the editorship of The Harp. The Wallace family carried on

5. Harvey, Loc. Cit.

with it for another year until the depression forced its discontinuance. M.W.W. says these years were full of rich experience and feels that she learned a lot about what not to write through her critical editing. Too, one of the compensations of this editorship without pay was the opportunity provided for discovering unknown talent and for making lasting friendships.

Three collections of poems saw print in ten years. May and Ernest Hartsock, Editor of Bozart Magazine, Atlanta, Georgia, contributed to each other's pages frequently. The poet's first book came about through a simple suggestion by Hartsock, "Aren't you about ready for a book?" Seesaw came out in 1929. A modernistic violet cover was designed to suggest the contrasting themes of the poems. The poem "Seesaw," which serves as the preface to the book, expresses the underlying theme of the book:

SEESAW

A child learns up. . . down. . .
 In a seesaw swing;
 Laugh. . . cry; Love. . . death;
 Poets sing;
 God Himself breathes rhythmically
 Fall. . . Spring; Fall. . . Spring.

See now in the up. . . down
 Of a seesaw swing;
 Key, pattern, symbol. All
 Of everything.
 Everything.

The book did well both in Georgia and Kansas, and since the author was given a sliding scale of royalties, both publishers and poet made some money. Merle suggested that May spend the profits on something permanent to commemorate this event, so through the years, linens and glass

for their table have appeared as royalty checks for books came in. Seesaw went into a second edition and was just ready for a third when the young Hartsock died suddenly. In 1933, Seesaw was chosen for exhibit at the Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago in the Social Science Building along with books, papers, paintings, and other pieces of work by the outstanding and better know artists and writers of the world.

The same year, In Double Rhythm, a book of block prints and verse, appeared. Each copy of In Double Rhythm was made entirely by hand by the poet with the aid of her husband Merle, who ran the old-fashioned clothes wringer to press out the prints from the linoleum blocks. Fifty-two copies of this book were sold at that time for \$25 to \$50 apiece, according to the number of verses and rpints included. Occasionally, even yet, requests for In Double Rhythm come in, and are made to order from the old blocks when a month's spare time work can be squeezed in. The blocks are now getting "somewhat worn around the edges," M.W.W. says. Only about a dozen new blocks have been made for poems written since the book made its initial appearance. The title of the book is explained by the fact that the line-rhythms in the block prints were easily interpreted by the poem which caused them to be made. . . . hence the double rhythm--that of sound of words and sweep of line.

The third book was put together after May and Merle moved to Wellington, Kansas, to take over the little family hotel left to the Ward brothers by their parents. Merle had sold his western Kansas grain interests in the nick of time before depression days, and he and May had taken a year's vacation. The adventures of life in this hotel,

termed the UNGRAND HOTEL by the poet, would make a book in itself. In a town so close to defense industries, during the World War II years May and Merle found it necessary to supplement the very inadequate help available. They took on every kind of work around the place, even doing patch plastering, emergency plumbing, and the dispatching of undesirable tenants, when necessary. Once more we see the versatility of M.W.W.'s personality--no temperament in this poet!

Busy with her work here and aiding in war effort activities elsewhere, she did little writing the next few years, but did collect some published poems to submit in the Kaleidograph Eighth Book Publication Contest. This book, From Christmas Time to April, won the competition and went into print in 1938, but had only one edition before war scarcities stopped thought of another. Mrs. Ward has three sections in the book: Christmas, April, and War. The theme of this book is that the nations sing "Peace on Earth" at Christmas and start wars in April. The last verse of the poem "From Christmas Time to April" sets the theme for the book of the same name.

FROM CHRISTMAS TIME TO APRIL

. . . .
 And from Christmas-time to April
 Men harshly change their ways
 From singing "Peace, Good will to men,"
 To selfish search for praise,
 To money grabbing, and to war
 Which often comes, (Remember?)
 Some few weeks past December,
 Often in April days.

The year 1925 found Mrs. Ward's poems appearing in four distinguished anthologies published in that year: an anthology of verse published by L.A.G. Strong in Oxford, England; the Braithwaite Anthology,

an anthology of magazine verse edited by William Stanley Braithwaite; Newspaper Anthology; and Poetry Cure, an anthology published by Robert Haven Shauffler. She has since appeared in a good many others, among them Contemporary Kansas Verse, edited by Helen Rhoda Hoopes; A Book of Poems for Every Mood, edited by Harriet Munroe; Beyond, An Anthology of Immortality, edited by Sherman Ripley; the 1946 edition of The Poetry Society of America Anthology, edited by Amy Bonner; Moon in the Steeple, a book of poetry compiled by editors of the Kalei-deograph Poetry Magazine, and The North America Book of Verse, published by Henry Harrison, with the Kansas section edited by Edna Becker of Topeka. Her poems have been chosen for inclusion in textbooks, also, two of which are Today's Literature, a Junior College text, and The Open Road to Reading, a Seventh Reader.

Proposed by Mrs. Edwin Markham, Mrs. Ward was elected a member of the Poetry Society of America in 1928. At this time only two other Kansas poets were members: Whitelaw Saunders of Wamego, and Professor Seldon L. Whitcomb of Lawrence. She helped organize the Poetry Society of Kansas and was an early president of the group. She is also a life member of the larger group, the Kansas Authors Club, and served as its State President in 1940. Since 1944, she has been a member of the National Screen Council, under the auspices of Box Office, the movie theatre magazine. She is also a member of P.E.O. and D.A.R., the Presbyterian Church, and is at this time President of her local literary club, Cary Circle.

Frequently in demand for speaking engagements, Mrs. Ward has appeared before many Federated Women's Club groups, such as those at

Detroit, Chicago, Des Moines, and Kansas City. She has spoken to faculty and student groups at Penn College, Oskaloosa, Iowa; Kansas State College, Manhattan, Kansas; Kansas University, Lawrence, Kansas; William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri; Fort Hays Kansas State College, Hays, Kansas; Wichita University and Friends University, Wichita, Kansas. She has given talks before the Missouri Writers' Guild, the Southwest Kansas Editorial Association, the Midwest Writers in Chicago, the Poetry Society in New York, the Wichita League of Women Voters in Wichita, Kansas, and numerous teachers' institutes and writers' conferences. She has had radio broadcasting experiences at various times, among them serving as the literature chairman in the series, "Women of Kansas," given over KFKU, the University of Kansas broadcasting station at Lawrence, Kansas.

Many of Mrs. Ward's poems have been set to music. The music for "Tremolo" was composed by Raymond C. Morly of California. E.F. Habercorn, a musician of Hutchinson, Kansas, wrote music for six poems, one an anthem published by the Lorenz Music Co. Several poems have been set to music by Rebecca Welty Dunn and Mary Carruth Barton. Mrs. Barton, who was a niece of the famous William Harrison Carruth, made the setting for "Song of Midnight."

SONG OF MIDNIGHT

Now let restlessness smooth to rest,
 (Asleep, asleep, asleep, asleep,)
 Rise and fall of your quiet breast
 (Asleep, asleep, asleep, asleep.)

One with rhythm of wind in tree,
 One with rocking of ships at sea.
 Hurry has vanished and ceased to be.
 (Asleep, asleep, asleep.)

Wrapped in fringes of golden fleece,
 (Asleep, asleep, asleep, asleep,)
 Softly step in the shoes of peace,
 (Asleep, asleep, asleep, asleep,)
 Into that magical country where
 Night has no chill and day no glare,
 Youth has wisdom and age is fair
 (Asleep, asleep, asleep. . . .)

Mrs. Ward says she has lost all track of when and where individual verses of hers have been used by commentators and poetry program directors, but she values such uses because of the intriguing thought of the unseen audience. Radio programs of her life and poems have been broadcast over several Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma stations as well as from New York and Chicago on national networks. Her verses have appeared on Ted Malone's program frequently.

M.W.W. has done quite a bit of writing other than poetry. For several years she was Poetry Editor of the Kansas Magazine and wrote forewords for the anthology section. She has also contributed articles on John Brown, Indians, and other Kansas subjects. She has sent brief prose articles to the American Magazine, Town Topics, the K.U. Magazine, The Writer's Digest, and various other publications over the years. She has written three dramatic skits: "The Perfect Figure" - a three-act farce written to fit the needs of clubwomen that was used first for the Seventh District Kansas Federation of Women's Clubs in 1928 at Larned; "Two Faced Mademoiselle Movie" - a fifteen minute skit for five women; and "Mrs. Club Woman's Dressmaker" - a skit on the national clubwomen's magazine, Club Woman, which was bought by the General Federation of Women's Clubs and presented at the national meeting in Miami, Florida, in 1938, by two Kansas women, Mrs. Daisy Johntz of

Abilene, and Mrs. C.W. Hunter of Wellington, now of Topeka. "Historical Hats" was written for the Coronado Cuarto Centennial celebration in Kansas in 1941. It was presented more than sixty times in Kansas and nearby states as a pageant with actual hats modeled in illustration. For awhile she was editor of a weekly column in Sunday's Topeka Capital called "Kansas Writers Capitalized." News of what Kansans were having published in magazines and newspapers was given, as well as names of their books, and included personality sidelights on the authors. She is a regular book-reviewer and occasional feature writer for the Wellington Daily News, published at Wellington, Kansas. She has compiled some "Do's and Dont's" for use by young and inexperienced writers.

In 1941, Approach to Social Studies Through Choral Reading was published, a collaboration of Mrs. Ward and Dorothy Harvel, who was an elementary teacher in the schools of Wellington. Included in the book were more than one hundred verses for children under twelve. Each carried a helpful hint on safety, health, geography, courtesy, good pronunciation, or tolerance. A preface was included to tell mothers or teachers how these original verses might be used for choral or concert reading if desired. This book has proved popular for classroom use.

Mrs. Ward is working on another book to be ready for publication sometime within a year. She plans to use the title "Wheatlands," the poems being reminiscent of the prairie lands of Kansas and its people, which she loves so well. A book of choral speech arrangements of great Bible passages, with interludes of background and character-revealing nature is also in preparation by M.W.W.

A poet of human sympathy, Mrs. Ward, whose dark hair is now greying, has a happy disposition with a reassuring sense of the humorous. Her light grey eyes often reflect shades of the colors she wears. They are usually the first feature which others notice because they show her varying emotions. She has kept the spontaneous enthusiasms of youth but they are increasingly tempered with the dignity and sympathy of maturity. Truly a poet, though a modest one, she is impelled always to express herself rhythmically, musically, poetically, yet in modern idioms.

CHAPTER III

POETRY OF MAY WILLIAMS WARD

From the first days of her writing, Mrs. Ward's diversity of interest can be traced. Even in the earliest poems, there are those of sadness and humor, those for children and those for adults, those of love and of disappointment, of earthy nature and spiritual aspiration. She still contributes to most of the variety of periodicals which have published her work from the first.

A weakness which Mrs. Ward points out in her earliest verse is lack of subtlety in rhythms and rhymes. Like most young writers, she used the well-worn ones which doubtless always seem fresh to beginners because they have not themselves used them, and have not as yet read widely enough to realize that they have been overused. There appear forsooth-youth, night-light, and true-you among the rhymes in her first two published verses, "Night in a Prairie Town" and "Youth Wants Summer." They also follow traditional rhythms. There is a hint of originality, however, in "Youth Wants Summer" in the fact that "moon" is not given the usual "June" rhyme, but is paired with "game"--not a rhyme at all, but an echo. Also here in the very first quatrain we find a favorite device of this author. . . the last line much shortened in length, to add emphasis. Asked if she were conscious of using these devices at the time, Mrs. Ward said that she was not, but that she was perhaps influenced by the Latin poets she had read in high school and college, whose use of the shortened line was frequent.

Very few of the set forms appear in the first years, during

which she wrote rhymed lyrics, or totally unrhymed "free verse" of lyric nature for the most part. In these poems swift movement to a usually fresh climax probably explains their appeal to editors. Hints of breaking away from these simplest forms appear rarely. Appearing in Town Topics in 1923, "My House Is Small" (afterwards widely anthologized), has a hammering repetitiveness instead of rhyme. This is an exceptionally mature poem for this early period.

MY HOUSE IS SMALL

An irrelevant cube:
Absurdity
Sucked by gravity
Against immensity;
Walled by diversity;
Roofed by infinity.

Mrs. Ward's most famous and most widely reprinted poem "My Little Sister" appeared in Poetry, Chicago, in 1925, only four years after her debut in writing, and keeps getting its name in anthologies and textbooks. Among others, it was included in The Poetry Society of America Anthology, 1946.

MY LITTLE SISTER

My little sister had everything,
Everything in the world--
Blue eyes, dimples, pink cheeks,
And her hair curled.

She played forward at basketball,
And shot ducks from cover.
She had a sweet rose-colored hat,
And a tall lover.

All her life she had everything,
Plenty and more than plenty.
She did not need a perfect death---
Death at twenty.

This poem has the simple four line stanza pattern; the rhymes are not

unusual, but not too trite; its virtues are strong character painting of two sisters in brief compass, a use of contemporary material (basketball, shooting ducks, rose-colored hat) and the twist at the end from the details to a look at the whole of life. . . is it not best to die young while still illusions hold? Probably the impetus given the poem's fame by Miss Munroe's printing it in Poetry, including it in one of her famous anthologies and personally praising it in her lectures and letters, is responsible for its being so widely read. Mrs. Ward and others do not regard it as the very best of her poems, though perhaps among them for its universality. There is variety in subjects but not in style in the early period of the poet's writing.

There appears a transition to better style. We find M.W.W. writing sonnets by 1927, of which "The Proof," published in Poetry in that year, and "Rise Like the Flood You Are," published in Household in 1929, are included here. The phrasing in "The Proof" flows naturally, so that sentences may end at any point within the lines. This avoids the tendency in a set form like this to let the phrase ends coincide with the line ends monotonously.

THE PROOF

He was a man that spoke in platitude
 And shaped his life, as well, by folk-worn saws.
 We wondered at him, not without a cause,
 So strange he seemed, ingenuous and crude;
 Having beliefs and rules for action! When
 A household friend seduced his wife away
 "Show yourself friendly," still we heard him say;
 And "Honesty is best," when other men
 Taking advantage of his openness
 Fooled him. Refuted so on every hand
 Still he believed. We cannot understand
 Why when he died, it seemed somehow success.
 Perhaps one platitude proved true. His face
 Shone as though finding Heaven a happy place.

"Rise Like the Flood You Are" never raised much stir, but Mrs. Ward says that it was interesting to write as being all-of-a-piece. It has one unhappy mood and one series of related figures of speech, all with a watery motif.

RISE LIKE THE FLOOD YOU ARE

And there is Autumn in the wind, to lend
 The attributes of water to it,--eaves
 Drip waterfalls of wind; among the leaves,
 And in my soul, it mildews. I should mend
 My warping roof and walls. I apprehend
 My house may flood or fall when it receives
 Full force, the wind with Autumn in it, heaves
 Beneath that torrent rising without end.

Would it be madness for a man to think
 That he could drown in wind with Autumn in it?
 Or cowardice to say,--Now wind, begin it?
 Though it run chill as from a glacier's brink
 I shall not struggle, nor my vow rescind.
 Rise like the flood you are, submerge me, wind.

By 1929, Mrs. Ward was experimenting rather wildly, sometimes with old forms and sometimes with new. An extreme example is "Dictator By a Dark Pool," first published in Troubadour, December, 1929, and afterwards revised and included in her book From Christmas Time to April. Such things were called sonnets by the young writers of those days though they had few sonnet characteristics, beyond being fourteen lines in length and having a turn of thought in the proper place, between the octet and the sestet.

DIKTATOR BY A DARK POOL

Deep, deep, desolate, dark and darkly troubled
 Deep pool where grey shreds of mist turn to globuled
 Ice beads in ice wind malevolently driven,
 Making hell, an ice hell hiding even heaven. . .
 Pool sinister even in the summer,
 Bare-shored, never still, so that never glimmer
 Bird's wing or sky's blue in undisturbed reflection,
 Whence come your treacheries of clutching and rejection?

Casting up white bones in a slow upheaval,
In a slow relentless surge spoke the pool primeval:

"Do you know your heart? . . . Nor I, why I must suck under.
Can warrior choose but kill? Storm speak except in thunder?"
There are pools, there are men, better left unquestioned;
Deep, deep, desolate, dark and darkly destined.

Another experiment of 1929 was with such verses as "This Is a Strange Night," published in Poetry Weekly, October, 1929, which employs internal rhymes in every line--a device which was only then beginning to come into general favor. It is rather a mystic poem and has a pair of words which rhyme in each line, inside each line. But their position within the line are irregular; they may be close together or far apart, and the rhymes may be only near-rhymes or echoes of a sound. Mrs. Ward says that it is one of the few of her poems which took the bit in its mouth, so that, for once she did not know exactly how it would end. She had to go back afterwards to fit in the internal rhyme in a few cases, although most of them appeared of their own accord.

THIS IS A STRANGE NIGHT

This is a strange night. Bright stars at the zenith
Tangled in angled webs of their own sharp rays
Are too remote, too cold, for the boldest Bird to
dream of;
But over the rest of the vast sky is a shadowy haze,

Haze like the deep shade made by a tree in summer,
With no points at the joints of the leaves where light
leaks in, . . .
Gentlest floating of wing will bring the Bird without
tremor
To nest and to rest in the dark sky, nearby and easy
to win. . . .

Dark tree fruited with hidden stars. The Bird unbidden
Sings, and the stars change to echoings of the song
Rhythmic in swing as the ring of the hooves of a horse
well ridden;
And they change again to a strange fragrance that lingers
long,

And after, to muted laughter; to gentle warmth enwrapping
 All, together;---but never to light. There is only a
 flush
 Too faint to mark in the dark, or to solve the hidden
 happy
 Mystery, whose ways are a part of the haze and the hush.

This is a strange night, bright stars lonesomely gleaming
 And mist all over the others,---star brothers, beloved
 unseen.

This is a strange word. . . The Bird of my soul gone
 dreaming,
 Singing, winging, to known stars in the dusk of worlds-
 between;

For even love, shown plainly, vainly offers its largesse
 Stars sharp at the zenith must ever shine apart,
 But lost, lost in the nimbus of stars lost in the darkness
 Wings melt into music, heart into star's heart.

Mrs. Ward's experiences editing The Harp in the late 20's and early 30's sharpened her critical faculty, no doubt, to the benefit of her own verse. In the 30's, she used almost all accepted forms freely, adapting form to expression of different emotions partly by instinct, seemingly, partly by rigid discipline. Her mathematical bent is shown in definitely patterned poems. She once said that nobody sets down a string of figures at random, with no thought or problem or desired result in mind, but many persons set down only vaguely related strings of words and call them poems. There are a good many examples of poems having thought patterns, or progressions, interwoven together. The very simplest thought-pattern is one often overlooked--the pattern of going somewhere. . . having a beginning, a development, and an arrival. "The Tree and I" is a triple pattern, each progressing from lightheartedness to tragedy: (1) the tree from gently moving leaves, to the time of fruiting, to crash; (2) the weather from breeze to fructifying rain, to lightning; (3) the woman from youth, to child-bearing,

to widowhood.

THE TREE AND I

Over the tree the breeze blew.
 Leaves moved gently, the birds knew
 Now was the time for sweetest song;
 They piped and caroled the day long.
 (I was a girl.)
 The breeze blew.

Into the tree the rain fell.
 Buds of fruit began to swell;
 Birds peeped bright-eyed out of the nest,
 Leaves hung glossy and calm, at rest.
 (I was a woman.)
 The rain fell.

Athwart the tree the lightning crashed
 And down through its heart in a moment
 flashed.
 From the broken trunk leaves sprang anew,
 But a long time after, and few, how few. . .
 (I was a widow.)
 The lightning crashed.

"Wind and Women" is also multiple-patterned: (1) Time: Primeval...
 ancient, classical...Bible times; (2) Persons: always two; (3) Wind...
 in all, and always bringing premonition to the women.

WIND AND WOMEN

Adam and Eve in the garden
 Find love, and find it sweet.
 A cool wind comes, to temper
 The heat.
 "Oh, the wind!" says Eve to her lover,
 "I feel a shiver of fear!
 We shall not be in this sheltered place
 Next year."

A barge on the Nile. A princess
 Seducing slaves and kings.
 A wet wind flaps over the river
 Its wings.
 "Oh, the wind!" says Cleopatra,
 And Anthony's arm she clasps,
 "In the dusk, do my bracelets look to you
 Like. . . asp's?"

Jesus helping His mother
 Gather the half-ripe fruit.
 A tempest threatens the vineyard,
 Branch and root.
 "Oh, the wind!" says Mary-Mother,
 "See, how the thorn-trees toss;
 And two of their broken branches make
 A . . . cross. . . "

Of the poems already quoted, "Pioneer" has a box pattern throughout, progressing with the stages of Jonathan's life through work, happiness, tragedy, and sublimation. . . also the ages of his life. Too, the boxes are in turn utilitarian, beautiful, necessary, and artistic.

In later years, humorous poems continue to appear, although they are not so numerous. Two of the brief nonsensical rhymes of this period are "Art Note" and "My Cousin Cynthia Says:".

ART NOTE

Mona Lisa's smile has caused much ado:
 Does it show arrogance, myster or "It"?
 Could it be instead that her store teeth are new
 And not a proper fit?

MY COUSIN CYNTHIA SAYS:

That she hated to move
 To this tiny village
 For more than one reason.
 She thinks nobody knows
 That her rugs are orientals,
 Or that her fur coat
 Is any better
 Than the ones the farmers
 Have made out of steer hides.

The dust bowl, the tornado, the cowboy, and other regional themes are frequent among her later poems. This type, such as "Pioneer," "Alien," "In Tornado Country," and "Death Cannot Conquer," sell well. She uses Biblical inspiration for some poems. Of this type, "In That

"Day" is worthy of mention. It was written in 1930, and based on Revelation 16:20, which is quoted in the first two lines, and with the atmosphere of the several chapters there describing the fall of Babylon. The implication at the time of writing was that men might conceivably become so wicked that God might wipe the slate clean and start all over. No editor in 1930 would buy the poem, because people then could not conceive that the world could come to an end. After the atom bombings, it could be believed, and the poem was immediately accepted in two places, by an error in the poet's submitting it when her old file card was not brought up to date. Poetry and Kansas Magazine both sent acceptance letters, and the poem also received the Poetry Society of America award and prize money in November, 1946. No changes were made in the poem after the atom bomb advent except in line nine, which originally read "Not the shadow of a sound;" but the poet had rigorously revised and improved it before the first attempts to sell it.

IN THAT DAY

"And every island fled away
And the mountains were not found,"
Nor were the rivers found;

The cities and the wheat-white plains
Were swallowed underground
And the void sucked in the ground;

The oceans turned to flying mist
And vanished without sound
After that first great sound.

And the race of men went with the rest
As Jehovah willed it should,
It was fitting that it should.

There was a nothingness of dark
Where once the planets stood,
Where once they sloped and stood,

And God looked on his handiwork
 And saw that it was good,
 The clean clear space was good.

Although May Williams Ward feels that it is pure fun to write poetry, her poems achieve the appearance of having come easily and without effort only after many rewrites and revisions, for only then is a poem finished to her. She stops many times during her housework to work on her poems, seldom letting an inspiration slip by. She works, mentally, from the interesting thought, which is usually the climax, backward, to its setting in nature or preliminary thoughts which lead to the climax. She works, physically, with a lead pencil first, and lying down, if possible, but anywhere, any time. . . on trains and busses, in church, in club meetings, at home. She cannot work while washing dishes for she needs pencil in hand and most of all, time, for the complete thinking through. It is only notes that she puts down when one sees her jotting on the back of a scrap of used paper while she is presumably listening to the speaker at a meeting.

She dislikes the word inspiration, feeling that a flash of intense interest is a phrase more nearly accurate to describe what happens to her in most instances. This interest can be provided or set off by almost anything, but the interest must not be just a passing one. She feels that something that hits her hard may hit others, especially if there is a singing phrase or two tagging along in her mind. In "Garden Wedding," quoted in Chapter I, there are two such phrases-- "lilacs jewel the border" and "there is thunder rolling in hearts of the parents." Sometimes this deep interest may be a strong emotion felt by the poet, or sometimes an accumulation of emotions over a period of

years, as happened in "Two Flowers for My Mother" and "In the Next Room," both quoted in Chapter II. Sometimes a combination of many persons, who have a strong trait of character, such as is found in the poem "Ironing," which appears in Chapter IV, and "In the Next Room," may be the beginning of a poem. Usually, she feels the rhythm pattern of a poem first, and the rhythm very often remains that of the first striking thought, the key theme. In most poems it is necessary to make many changes to make the sound suit the sense better or to enrich the first bare thought. This was true in the making of "Garden Wedding."

"Poets and Near-Poets" was the subject of a talk on poetry and effusions meant to be poetry given by Mrs. Ward at a meeting of the Missouri Writers' Guild. In part, she said:

We can be mildly intoxicated with character sketches that take us out of ourselves with interest in others; with the effervescence of whimsy, with the sweetish brews of natural descriptions. There are knockout drops of harsh realism, and many other kinds of verse.

But the thing we value most, in poetry as in wine, is bouquet. . . that elusive something that makes the eye look far away and the spirit leap to lean upon a cloud. This we find in mystic and symbolic poetry.

Mrs. Ward's poems are varied because she herself is many-sided. Some of her poems come to her in double form, her hand making rhythmic sweeps in time to the beat of the meter, while her voice drones the words. By way of explaining the meaning of the poems with rhythm-lines which appeared in her book In Double Rhythm to her niece Mary Lu Hill, the poet wrote a letter in 1939, a part of which follows:

If you are in a brown study and happen to have a pencil in your hand, do you make "doodles?" If so, you will find that your mood of the moment is somehow expressed in these seemingly meaningless marks. You fairly dig the pencil into the paper if you

are annoyed. . .you couldn't possibly make roses at the moment! Likewise, anybody would naturally make curved lines if saying "Rockaby baby." A straight line for such an idea is unthinkable!

In some such way, for certain of my poems, I found that while thinking of them, the pencil sometimes made rhythms instead of words, and always these lines were a real expression of the mood and meaning of the poem. . . It seemed to fly on two wings. . . one the rhythm of the words, the other the rhythm of the lines. Not all my poems come in this way, but when they do, I take them seriously, and when I have time, later, I transfer the subconsciously made line-rhythms to a linoleum or wood block, never changing the actual nature of them. For instance, in the poem "Decrescendo" there are two moons--against nature! But the first lines "The arc of the moon is waning, Is smooth as her upward swing" came out that way, probably because two periods of life, youth and age, are symbolized by the moon in the two different phases.

In Double Rhythm is a book made up of poems and their accompanying line-drawings. The original crude lines are made almost subconsciously as a doodler works. They are later translated into linoleum cuts, in which form they appear in the book. The illustrations are wholly symbolic of the more subconscious poems--harsh, rough-angled lines express such emotions as jealousy and resentment, while smooth-flowing lines like waves and birds in their general outline express the softer emotions and dreamy thoughts. The original lines were actually made beating time to the rhythm of the poem, and these structural lines are kept in the block prints, only background and unessential detail being added. Mrs. Ward's story of the conception of the relationship of line-rhythm to a poem is interesting:

One day at the home of Nell Lewis Woods in Kinsley, we saw a magnificent tower of clouds through her windows and we both had the feeling of leaving earth behind as one so often does in the presence of a beautiful thing. I said part of the poem right then, my fingers making curving motions for the three terraces of clouds and of course making a swift, upshooting line for "instantly leap." ("The Tower") I don't remember making any rhythm for the body at the time, but it is represented in the woodcut by the little bent line in one corner. The con-

clusion is symbolized by the other upsweeping line, this time mounting more consciously and slowly, up the three levels of the tower.¹

"The Tower," the poem which resulted from this feeling of rhythm, was published in 1931, in the Larned Tiller and Toiler.

THE TOWER

Tower, tower, tall tower,
Cloud tower, opal-white. . .
You are cornerstoned in the sunrise.
You have arches of dream-delight.

Body, body, earthbound
And broken of back with care, . . .
I leave you behind, and instantly
Leap to that spire in air.

Tower, tower, I mount you
Needing no wing, no stair.

The poem "Rose Tree and Redbirds" grew out of an actual experience of the poet. It was published in The Forum. When Mrs. Ward made her book of double rhythms, the line rhythm of this poem turned out to be more artistic than most of them.

ROSE TREE AND REDBIRDS

Rose Tree is sorrowful
Bows down her head,
Rose Tree is widowed,
For Summer is dead.
Gone, too, their children,
Brief beauty done:
Frail little rosebuds
Gone, every one.

Rose Tree is comforted
Lifts up her head;
Bears in the snow time
Roses of red,

1. Interview. Dodge City Globe, May 20, 1933.

Or else they are redbirds--
 Beautiful things,
 Posthumous roses,
 Roses with wings.

Mrs. Ward's poems are usually brief. Although she attempts to retain the mood in which the ideas for a lyric are born, she chooses the form in which to convey them after considerable deliberation. Her thoughts, as she once said, "grow into their forms." She places theme above form. Instead of ingenious creations of verse patterns, ideas go into words that have the greatest emotional value; yet often there can be found the use of climax, repetition, alternation, and theme, as in her poem "Tree Cut Down," published in Poetry Magazine, in 1934.

TREE CUT DOWN

Yes, you can kill a tree, but it's hard to
 kill it!
 Fell it, still the stubborn stump will remain.
 (And a heart cut down will live on a root of
 pain)
 And shoots will spring, in the season named
 for that urging,
 From the broken stump, and the broken heart. . .
 again.

Her verse, both humorous and contemplative, has a singing quality and is particularly adapted for setting to music. Her poems of the prairie take their music out of the poet's environment--winds, birds, the rhythm of the windmill, the Kansas scene. Her "no-two-alike" theory mentioned in the biographical chapter is a major theme in her poems. She is subtle, reaches an unexpected climax or ending because she believes that a writer must not be too definite nor say a thing too baldly lest he spoil his effect. "My Little Sister" is an excellent example of the

use of this device. There is a delicate fancy and imagery and a limpid expression to her poetry that is no doubt accounted for by her simplicity and directness of speech.

As has been mentioned before, M.W.W. makes use of Biblical themes for many of her poems. Her poem "Christmas Legend" is one of her most original, for she drew upon her imagination to describe what happened to the three gifts, a license which she could take because of the choice of "legend" in the title. Although the poem is a double sonnet, perhaps the narrative would have been more effective in a freer form, for there is a very great condensation of thought in the latter part that needs slow reading and many pauses to give the hearer time to take in the meaning. For instance, it takes a moment to realize that "that Friday" was the Crucifixion Day. This poem appears in the book From Christmas Time to April.

CHRISTMAS LEGEND

The three kings in their purple and brocade
 Came to the holy manger. Mary wept
 Weak tears of joy at those rich gifts they laid
 Upon the clean straw where the young Child slept.
 "How beautiful the golden ball," she said,
 "The box of myrrh, the alabaster jug
 Of incense. Put them here beside my head
 To keep for Him, beneath the saddle rug."

The Child grew swiftly. When He came to be
 A stripling, Joseph helped Him make a chest
 To put His childish treasures in: the three
 Gifts, and His Sabbath robe and seamless vest.
 And Christ would raise the lid of olive wood
 To let His brothers look, when they were good.

Then came the scourge to Nazareth, and all
 The family but Christ were stricken down.
 He sold the gold ball at the money-changer's stall
 And took His sick to hills above the town.

But Joseph kept the scourge's mark and died
 Lingeringly. So Jesus gave the myrrh
 To spice the tomb. . . And Mary thought: "A bride
 My child will want sometime. He keeps for her
 The Frankincense." . . . Undreamed of was that day,
 That Friday . . . when her anguish found no tear
 Till, kneeling by His treasure chest to pray
 She found a scrawl, dated in His twelfth year:
 "This is the nicest gift of all I had.
 For Mother. Open sometime when you're sad . . .

Word-consciousness is one of the poet's tools which is always used. Sometimes this use is plainly stated as in the poem "To Know Words," first published in the American Mercury, in February, 1948. In 1951, the publishers and the poet have been asked for permission to include it in a college textbook in preparation by Lionel Crocker of Denison University faculty, to be published by Prentice-Hall.

TO KNOW WORDS

To know a word it is not enough
 To recognize its serrate shape
 Upon a page, or to sneak with care
 All its syllables justly.
 But from endless blowing of prairie wind
 Is learned whole meanings of many words:
 Glare, force, monotony,
 Loneliness, diminishment,
 Selfhood goes blank in a trance of wind;
 Wind seems to spell. . . forever.

An anthology of May Williams Ward's poems would not be complete without including some of those which she has written for children. "I Like Winter" appears in the Harvel-Ward book of poems for children, arranged for choral reading, and is meant to be used by early grade children.

I LIKE WINTER

Type: Sequence with Unison

(Solos by five children representing the five senses.)

- Solo 1: I like Winter!
Frosty squeaky hinges
On the doors. . .
- Solo 2: And windows trimmed
With icicle fringes.
- Solo 3: I like Winter!
Christmas-tree spice
Is nice to smell.
- Solo 4: I like to eat
Snow and ice.
- Solo 5: I like Winter!
Everything feels slick
Even through my mittens.
- All: Oh, Winter, come quick!
For we like Winter!
To hear and see and smell
And taste and feel.
We like Winter Very, Very well.

Correlates with lessons on the five senses.

Another slow, quiet, contemplative poem included in this book is "Partly a Sadness" and is unexpectedly liked by the older grade children, even though it lacks drama.

PARTLY A SADNESS

Type: Three-Part Arrangement

- Group 1: Now when the snow slips over the hill,
Now when the dark comes while it is day,
There is a strangeness when all grows
still,
Partly a sadness, partly a thrill,
Someway.
- Group 2: It is then we remember the wrong we do,
It is then we wonder what makes a cloud,
And where children have gone we used to
know,
Lost from us now in some far-off crowd.
- Group 3: It is partly a sadness, partly a thrill,

When the great white snow comes over the
 hill,
 And we think our thoughts in the dark and
 the chill,
 It is partly a sadness, partly a thrill
 Someway. . .

For a small, thoughtful, older group.

Very early the poet discovered that verses about children and humorous
 verses were most saleable of all. "The Cynic" was published in the
New York Sun in 1921.

THE CYNIC

There isn't any Santa Claus;
 There isn't any tree
 That grows its presents by itself--
 They've been a-fooling me;
 Since I've found out the honest truth
 'Bout one thing and another,
 I wonder if this woman here
 Really is my mother?

"Overcoats" was first published in the Country Gentleman and since has
 been revised to make it fit better into a musical setting, which was
 made by Grace V. Wilson, Wichita Supervisor of Music, and published
 in the American Book Company's series of Music Readers.

OVERCOATS

The little bushes in our yard
 Are very warm and nice,
 All wrapped up for the winter
 In their overcoats of ice.

And the rabbits nosing in the snow
 Where the beets and turnips were,
 Are just so snug and cozy
 In their overcoats of fur.

My mother must have noticed them--
 She's smart as she can be--
 For she took Dad's old suit and made
 An overcoat for me!

"Questions" made its first appearance in Child Life in 1925.

QUESTIONS

If muscles grow with using
 Do other things, too?
 If so, take care in choosing
 Everything you do.
 For instance, in a garden
 With a very fragrant rose--
 Might there not be danger
 Of growing too much nose!

One of Mrs. Ward's earliest free verse attempts was "Psycho-Analyst," published in the Lyric West in November, 1924. Another good example of her many free verse rhythms is "Anthology," published in Poetry World, in July, 1932.

PSYCHO-ANALYST

November wind,
 Persistent, not to be diverted
 Persistent,
 Drags from subterranean graves
 Fears,
 Regrets,
 Shames,
 Primordial fetishes,
 Horrid cadavers of loves.

ANTHOLOGY

Dawn is lyric, day a ballad, sunset,
 Epic.
 Night, anthology of all,
 Sings, narrates, storms, shouts. . .
 Sentimentally, tritely,
 Of love in the moonlight;
 Brutally, surprisingly, strangely,
 Page after page in haphazard juxtaposition
 Of love in the shadow
 Of gateways to hell
 Of crimes in the ghetto
 Of lost ships at sea
 Of anguish at parting
 Of law's last decree

Of lusts
 Of murders
 Of gay country loiterings
 Of cuddly pink children asleep
 Of starshine on meadows with nobody seeing
 Of ruins in old countries, softened by
 nightshine
 Of birth hours of torment bringing beginnings
 Of death hours of torment bringing beginnings
 Of self-love seen clearly in silent communings
 Of sleep, the great boon unregarded by young
 folk,
 Of sleep, the great boon the desired of old
 folk.
 Night,
 Anthology
 In special edition of one copy
 Compiled for you
 And the plates immediately destroyed.

In late years Mrs. Ward writes many poems in the veiled manner which seems obscure until read with attention. Modern poets are driven to this by the feeling that everything has been said and too plainly. Likewise, expression of the deeper layers of the subconscious mind is appropriately voiced thus. Readers of this type of verse are few, but appreciative.

"This Is a Strange Night," quoted elsewhere, is a half-hinted, half-spoken meditation on the mysterious Bird, the creative urge, with overtones of other mystic relationships. The poem "I Apprehend Petals," printed in Kansas Magazine, has the personal meaning which is often criticized. It may be an enigma to the casual reader. A childless woman thinks for a moment she almost knows what motherhood is like ("What petals curve to cover" -- the seed). The connections and sequences are obscure even to the writer, she reported when asked, but the emotion is genuine, and she does not care whether the poem is liked or understood. This and other poems are not ones of communication

except in part, and that part is perhaps different with each reader. Other obscure poems that might be mentioned are "Streets of Dark Dream" and "Dictator By a Dark Pool."

I APPREHENDED PETALS

A small thing made me happy.
 My hand smoothed satin.
 Satin smoothed my body
 Body smoothed my heart.
 And when my heart was happy
 I apprehended petals
 And what petals curve to cover
 Without tearing them apart.

Mrs. Ward has stated that she feels that "mathematics in the higher forms is pure poetry." True to her mathematical interest, she likens the writing of her poetry and the response it awakens in others to a circle:

Out of my individual mix of all things read, experienced, and felt, sometimes a lyric emerges that meets response from other people. If poetry is shared emotion, I have been fortunate enough to share. Fan letters--the term sounds cheap but the experience of getting them is not--fan letters complete a circle. The emotion felt; the coloring of it in the subconscious mind; the struggling to express a fraction of its vividness; so much of an arc I make myself. Then the editor, the printer, and the reader take over and extend the curve. But unless some reader writes to me, or some hearer says, "I have felt that, too," there is a tiny gap. Response completes the circle.

Sometimes the response is not agreement but a violent disagreement. The circle is completed just the same. Sometimes a reader discerns something more than was originally intended. That not only completes the one circle but perhaps starts another intersecting one. In any case, poetry is utterance, and to talk to nothingness and nobody would be thwarting. I am grateful that a large share of my utterances see print, and bring letters and often new friends.²

Her hobby of helping young writers has been of more interest to

M.W.W. than any of her others. Called upon many times for suggestions in writing poetry, she has formulated a series of "Do's and Don't's." In these we see reflections of her own poetic theories and the basis for her style qualities.

DO analyze your gift. Do your poems come as ideas?--as musical rhythms?--as pictures?

DO polish. There is nothing sacred about the first combination of words that pops into the head. Change, improve, to give your exact shade of meaning.

DO emphasize climax, dramatic arrival somewhere.

DO use suggestion to gain atmosphere. Do not baldly name objects, catalog feelings.

DO be brief if your theme allows.

DO read aloud in decided sing-song to discover places hard to pronounce and faults in meter.

DO try for rich sound-texture by varying the vowels. The liquid consonants l, m, r, n, are pleasing; k, t, b, etc., harsh. Too many s sounds hiss or buzz.

DO leave something to the imagination. The best poems have an inner meaning unexpressed, parallel to the outward meaning.

DO be progressive. Take a writer's magazine if a beginner; anyway, the best magazine of the class to which you aspire; a poetry magazine . . . ; buy an anthology which gives poems from many MODERN writers successful with editors. Analyze all you read. WHY do you dislike or like?

DON'T use threadbare rhymes such as love--above.

DON'T spoil your climx by failing to stop; and point no morals.

DON'T use too much the hackneyed 3-4 meter. It is hard to overcome the handicap of having your poem go to the tune of "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

DON'T use the old-fashioned "thee," "e'en," "ere," etc.

DON'T invert the order of words. "Serene sky" is better than "sky serene."

DON'T be Victorian with flowery words and phrases. One "beauteous" insures a rejection slip. Modern poems are simple, direct, nearly like speech.

DON'T use the usual adjective. Find a new, colorful, unusual one.

DON'T write of far-off lands and people. Yourself, your local color is best.

DON'T fail to give thought to your title. It is your show-window.

DON'T think your poem is clear unless its idea can be stated in one short prose sentence that makes sense. Too many ideas confuse.

.
DON'T be too tender toward your poem because it is yours. Weeds may grow in any garden. Finest blossoms come from careful pruning. Robert Graves says: "When in doubt, cut it out."

The poet feels that faultless rhythm will make a poem different because rhythm is the keynote to poetry. Rhyme is good in poetry, but rhyme without rhythm is not good. Mrs. Ward believes strongly that there is an inexhaustible supply of material for poetry wherever one may live, whether it be in the smallest village, upon a farm, or within a great city. Everywhere there are beauty, charm, and quaintness if one looks with discerning eyes. Everywhere there are the freshness of nature, people who are individuals, and happenings which may touch tragedy or comedy, regardless of the background scene. Any phase of any life may be a story waiting for the energetic writer to relate.

Another side of Mrs. Ward is evident in the realistic and practical viewpoint she takes in the prose article which she wrote for

The Author and Journalist:

Verse writers, as a rule, like to sell their stuff, if only to vindicate themselves for the time and effort put into their effusions and for protection against the askance looks unpublished poets often receive. . . .

It is a strange thing, but after the emotional spill of making a poem is over and a certain time has elapsed, the idea

may be clothed in any one of several different ways. Pick out some good journeyman verse of yours, and just for a stunt try to fit it into three of the below classifications. Make a different dress for each, or perhaps you may be able to transform it by a twist at the end. . . .

.

The various types, ranged in order of their salability, according to my experience, are as follows:

1. Humorous verse, very short and with a sharp climax.
2. Verses for or about children, under 16 lines.
3. "Moonlight and roses". . . the equivalent of the young-love short story. But never use this or similar trite phrases.
4. Verses of purely masculine appeal. . . sly but not bitter digs at women, praise of dogs, fishing, etc.
5. Nature poems. Avoid the "pathetic fallacy" of making natural objects have the feelings of humanity, but sales-chance is improved if a likeness to the problems of humanity is implied, not stated openly.
6. Regional verse, full of colorful characters or characteristics of your own environment. A Kansan sells many verses about tornadoes, the dust bowl, cowboys, pioneers.
7. Religious verses. . . not overly pious, but tender and sincere.
8. Poems of today's social and racial conflicts, of war, etc.
9. Philosophical and symbolic poems.

.

After all this talk about which types are easiest to sell, there is one more angle. The difficult verses to sell, when they do sell, are all the more precious to the proud poet-parent. So bolster up your morale with some easy-selling ones; then tackle the task of getting the best and subtlest thing you ever wrote into print.³

In rapid review, the lyrical style of May Williams Ward as a poet is one in which she shares emotions and sense-impressions with the reader through the use of colorful and compressed language and vital verbs in sentences that move rhythmically, whether rhymed or not. Although the thoughts of the poet move in straightforward, natural speech, something is left to the imagination, and many times the climax of the poem is reached in a short, unexpected ending line. She makes use of

3. May Williams Ward, "What Types of Verse Sell Best?" The Author and the Journalist, (January, 1939), p. 8.

vivid fancy and imagery in her verse, the whimsicality of her personality lending a limpid expression to her poetry. More often Mrs. Ward prefers the definite rhythm of rhymed verse to free verse, although she lets the content of the poem dictate the form it shall take.

In all her poems there is underlying precision and logic.

CHAPTER IV

RECOGNITION AS A POET

May Williams Ward is no doubt readily acknowledged as the foremost Kansas poet because there is appeal in her sincere and straightforward acknowledgment of the prairie and its people as the major theme of her writing. Imbued with a deep-rooted sympathy for the hardy prairie women, she successfully evokes an emotional response in the reader of one of her earlier poems, "Structural," which was published in Contemporary Verse, in October, 1928.

STRUCTURAL

The abrasive winds had scraped her face
Of every obvious charm;
But humor could not be rubbed out,
Here was a thing of the structure,
The way the planes of her face were hinged,
A vital quality, built in the bone,
Not an ornament tacked on.

The poet's delight in the plains as contrasted with New England, where her poem "Sky-Mountain" was written, is evident:

SKY-MOUNTAIN

Prairie land is golden
Airy, wide,
The sky our only mountain,
We, inside.
Who would choose a small land,
Where the hills,
Steadily asserting
Granite wills,
Narrow all horizons,
Stand apart?
Ah, my golden prairie,
In the sky-mountain's heart!

Sensitive to the beauties of nature in Kansas, she wrote "Spring

Day in Kansas," which was first published in the Kansas Magazine in June, 1933.

SPRING DAY IN KANSAS

This is a day like days in a story book,
 With glitter in the air that glorifies
 The edge and tip of every leaf, and lies
 In pools of mirror strangeness on the brook.
 Pale trees are deeply shadowed with the look
 Of Rendezvous, and clouds like turrets rise.
 This is a day for knights and their empires.
 Treasure seems probable in any nook.

And I am not a changeling in the tale.
 My ears feel pointed. I can talk in rhyme
 Today, and knowwhat birds say in their song.
 I'll find a nest, I know, here in the swale,
 And over this next hill that I shall climb,
 The lover that I have waited for so long.

"Wet Summer," which expresses the response of the wheatlands country to wet weather, appeared in Poetry, August, 1947.

WET SUMMER

The hollyhocks are ten feet tall,
 The larkspur deeply colored,
 Once dried-up lakes are nearly full
 And shelter half-grown mallard.

The ivy overflows its urn.
 The elm which long drouth withered
 Revives, and on each branch-tip burn
 Bright leaflets, newly feathered.

The crows have grown not quite so rude,
 The robins, fat as butter.
 They chant a new Beatitude:
 BLESSED BE. . . WATER!

"The Shower" gives another picture of rain on the prairie lands. It is written in modern verse form and was published in Tomorrow in February, 1947. This poem has two motifs. . . the scent of roses and of rain, and the color of the wheatfield before and after rain--brighter silver

after the silvery rain has fallen--and the rose more fragrant after the fragrant rain.

THE SHOWER

Not only the delicate rose gives scent to summer,
 Not only stubble is silver over the plain,
 There is the rain
 With its own magnificent multilinear shimmer,
 Its own cool smell,
 And as well. . .
 The magic to polish brighter the wheatfield's metal
 And to rose-perfume the rose-perfumed petal.

"Glory Mountain," a sonnet first published in The Wichita Beacon in 1940, then again in The New York Herald-Tribune, August 29, 1950, reveals the poet's mathematical interest as well as her awareness of the Western Kansas panorama.

GLORY MOUNTAIN

The sky is bare of cloud. The earth is bare
 Of all but wheat. No rock, no cloud, no tree
 Against horizon-round immensity.
 A perfect geometric flourish, where
 The vast plain intersects the sphere of air.

A mathematic horror this would be,
 Too much for courage or philosophy
 If dusk did not bring sea and mountain there.

Yes, at twilight, all day's hardness is undone
 In shadow softly vague. A soft wind cleaves
 The solid-seeming sheet in waves crest-white,
 And ocean-colored underneath. The sun goes down;
 And in the western sky it leaves
 A glory-mountain! . . . made of rosy light!

The poet is at her best in the portrayal of the homely lives of simple Kansas folks whom she has known, either personally or through family history. The hardship and discouragement experienced by the farmer of the plains, pioneer or modern, show in her poem "In Time of Drought," published in the North American Review in 1934.

IN TIME OF DROUGHT

Drought is not only the lack of rain,
 Not only. . .
 In drought man thinks that he prays in vain. . .
 Ah. . . lonely. . .
 Forsaken. . . resentful. . . he shrivels inside. . .
 Apart
 From the bone-bare field and the choking herd,
 There is drought. . . of heart.

A lifelong pride in the deeds of John Brown, a figure historically important in her home town Osawatomie comes to light in "John Brown and the Cabin." This poem was used in a pageant written by Anna January, and later appeared in The Forum.

JOHN BROWN AND THE CABIN

Some of these logs he helped to hew and haul.
 His adze marks show
 Along the foursquare trunks within this wal. . .
 And who can know
 How much his heart had loved each separate tree?
 They taught him strength. . .
 And rectitude. . . and calm. . . and certainty
 That he at length
 Must sacrifice himself as utterly
 At freedom's call,
 As trees accepted death with dignity
 To make this wall.

The patterned repetition of "Pioneer," which appeared in the American Mercury in December, 1949, emphasizes her admiration for the early prairie people's indomitable will that surmounted all the difficulties of their lives.

PIONEER

Jonathan was busy. He made boxes:
 A tool chest, a wagon bed, a foursquare granary,
 a house of logs with puncheon floor,
 and a letter box with a key.

Jonathan was happy. He made boxes:

A cupboard for his Mary, a fragrant cedar chest
and a cradle carved from walnut
where their child-to-be might rest.

Jonathan was sorrowful. He made boxes
To hold his father and his friend and many another
more
and. . . Mary, too, when hooded plague
knocked at their low plank door.

But Jonathan must live on. He made boxes
Seasoning and shaping heart of the maple tree
into violins to sing for him
love. . . and agony.

The experience of pioneers on the wheatlands is perhaps summed up in the next brief poem. They found out what conquering nature meant, not by reading or hearing about it, but by actually experiencing its difficulties. "Experience" was published in The Adult Bible Class Monthly in May, 1941.

EXPERIENCE

YOU took an arc, and computed
The size of the circle, thereby.
I measured it, crawling around it
In weariness ready to die.
In one hour YOU'D forgotten the answer.
NOT I! NOT I!

Truly pictured, without elaboration, Kansas settings recall nostalgic memories. In "Alien," published in the Harp, in October, 1949, the coming of settlers from many foreign countries to the Wheatlands may be symbolized by Mrs. Ward's picture of the dust from far away blown into Kansas in the dust storm days.

ALIEN

Remember how the sharp sand cut
The wheat, (and equally the heart)
In days of drouth? . . . Remember dust
Yellow as copper. . . red as rust. . .

And granite-black? It swirled and seethed.
 And yet, in spring new wild-flowers wreathed
 The prairie stretches, seeded there
 By winds that blew from. . . who knows
 where. . .

How red the fruit, how tall the grain,
 Since alien dust enriched the plain!

"Selections from a Sequence, DUST BOWL" finds its inspiration, too, in the days of the Kansas dust storms. These lines were a Poetry Society of America prize winner for M.W.W.

Selections from a Sequence, DUST BOWL

Dust again. All our values are shaken
 When earth and air reverse their functions
 When earth is taken
 And swirled in sky. . . and when air
 Is a choke and a curse and a heaviness
 pushing despair
 Under the sill and into the hardpressed lung.

.

. . . if the rain
 Comes, however late, unfruitful, out of season,
 there is springing of hope again
 Long after spring. The mind cannot cope
 With the strangeness of this untimely, illogical
 swing
 Upward; but even with hopeless hope
 The heart can cope,
 Itself is a strange thing.

.

We had known we should not really starve
 Though the cows and the grass had died,
 But we moved like sleepwalkers, half alive,
 Our hearts were dry inside.
 Today when it rained, we ran out doors
 And stood and cried.

In two poems, "In Tornado Country" and "Tornado," she has caught the fearsome rush of wind which the plains people dread so much.

IN TORNADO COUNTRY

Mauna Loa spewing fire
 Is a spectacle men may admire.

But the sky's eruption, never!
 What the tortured clouds uncover,

The monstrous and misshapen cone,
 Is a volcano upside down;

And pours from it through the livid
 air
 The spreading lava-flow of fear.

TORNADO

Leaves stood still, and our hearts stood
 still,
 But the sky was a-boil with clouds,
 A coppery wrack, and the greenish black
 Of shrouds.
 We dove for shelter, and none too soon.
 The universe swayed and swirled,
 And the monstrous horn of a unicorn
 Gored the world.

The response of the reader to these poems may be explained by her conviction of the worth of the Kansas prairies and its people to the poet which she expresses in her prose piece "Prairies and Poets:"

On the prairie any man can see with his bodily eyes that the earth is round, that it is huge, that he himself is literally the center of it. In humility he recognized this, for to be able to touch on the perfect hoop of the horizon, he would need the radius of infinity or the arm of a god. In life of imagination, and in pride, he sees this, for the sky is visibly domed about him as the focal point. These things soberly, mathematically true in relativity, are realizable to any man-- to the poet, assimilable in ecstasy. If he is limited in outlook, obscure, unimaginative, it is not the fault of his horizon or his sky.

Great winds sweep the prairie--not merely gentle hill breezes slipping up valleys or sliding downhill with waterfalls, not treacherous ocean gales, nor cruel, sudden mountain storms. Our winds are of many moods, but always swooping, big, direct and wholesome. A poet whose themes are petty, low or cruel, has not listened to these winds.

The color scheme of the prairie is subtle. No petrified spottings or bouquet tintings are here, but broad compositions, sophisticated combinations of russet, tawny gold, sage-grey, set off by the rich vividness of the sky. The prairie sky gives no precedent for verses pale, poorly harmonized, or with

blotchy color.

The flavor of antiquity is here for any palate that craves it. Artifacts of Pre-Aryan civilization and fossils of prehistoric animals are thick in the chalk of the prairie soil. And over it pass dramatic historic events in procession--think of Quivera, Indian wars, the Santa Fe Trail, John Brown, and many more. Experiments in legislation, the crotchets of cranks, every variety of fad in health and religion, all flourish here. The poet whose work is conventional, without background, has no excuse.

And the prairie people! They are salty, racy, breezy. Even the morons are original in their morosity with unexpected picturesque details. The man with two automobiles and no bathtub lives here, as well as the one who has a sod shanty full of walnut furniture and William Blake paintings. Stereotyped characterization, featureless conversation, outworn metaphor need never enter to nullify the poet's impulse to record and interpret if he understands those about him. . . .¹

Still, the appeal of her poetry is not one of provincialism, for the universal quality of her poems is evidenced in the fact that they have been accepted for publication in many leading periodicals with a national circulation. Without question, she has attempted to project these regional traits into something bigger, as can be seen in her statement made when she became Poetry Editor of the Kansas Magazine in 1949.

Poetry by Kansans, like Tennyson's brook, goes on forever. Not spectacularly, but pleasingly, with surface sparkle over determined direction, as inevitable as the pull of gravity on all waters flowing. . . . We can claim for writers from our state, no great regional distinction. Perhaps the "one world" rapidly becoming reality, must wipe out regionalism. . . .

In M.W.W.'S poem "The Undiminished," published in the Kaleidograph, Kansas is the background for a more universal appeal to the imagination. The setting might be adjusted to the environment of any reader.

1. May Williams Ward, "Prairies and Poets," Community Arts and Crafts Magazine, LI(February, 1928), 14, 19.

THE UNDIMINISHED

Against the high-arched splendor of the west
 At twilight, self-assertive works of man
 Look small. The towering silo on the crest,
 The factory, the bridge's triple span.
 And branching highways, all seem only marks
 In grayish chalk smudged vaguely there below
 The mighty spectacle of sunset arcs
 Crisscrossing saffron, red, and indigo.

Yet certain birds of steel that man has made
 Are undiminished by the sky. They dwindle
 To sparrow-size, aloft in heaven's arcade. . .
 But strike our hearts with GIANT power to kindle
 Imagination. . . Now, since man can fly,
 What is for him too deep, too strange, too high?

The popularity which her poems have attained outside Kansas may be judged somewhat by the fact that her verse has been published in every poetry magazine in America and in a great many of the popular periodicals, a partial list of which includes:

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse	Nation
North American Review	Country Gentleman
The Bookman	Commonweal
The Forum	American Mercury
Good Housekeeping	Independent Woman
The Ladies' Home Journal	The Lyric West
Bozart	Muse and Mirror
Pictorial	Tomorrow
Bi-Monthly Poetry Review	The Measure
Town Topics	Life
Judge	Poetry and Contemporary Verse
Voices	Poetry World
The Saturday Evening Post	Kaleidograph
Contemporary Verse	The Kansas City Star
The Harp	The Wichita Beacon
Troubadour	The New York Times
Talaria	The New York Sun
Household	The Topeka Capital
Musical Leader	The Denver Post

A letter from a reader in North Dakota reveals the opinion of a stranger distant from Kansas:

The Curtis Publishing Company,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Gentlemen:

In your last issue of the Ladies' Home Journal, there are some poems entitled "Prairie Songs," by May Williams Ward.

As a resident of North Dakota, knowing the climatic as well as the living conditions, I wish to state that the poems are the most condensed and descriptive of conditions in North Dakota that could be rendered.

I would be glad to know who May Williams Ward is, and if she has written many poems. I certainly would like to secure the same, if they are published in a volume.

I am having several copies made to send to friends of mine in New York.

Jamestown, No. Dak.
Feb. 9, 1923.

Yours very truly,
H. S. Stebbins,
Vice-President
Midland Continental Railroad

As mentioned in the biographical chapter, Mrs. Ward's verses have been included in many anthologies, both American and English, sometimes for remuneration--an accomplishment in the eyes of any writer--and in several textbooks. In these she is mentioned as a representative contemporary American poet.

Published poems of May Williams Ward are listed in the Reader's Guide as far back as the November, 1922, issue of Good Housekeeping, in which the poem "Ironing" appeared. An interesting sidelight on this poem is that M.W.W. (who has no children) received many fan letters sympathizing with her for the lack of appreciation of her loved ones, saying they felt the same.

IRONING

I have ironed my husband's shirts, oh, very smoothly;
I wish I could as easily erase
His frowning, worried look of inattention--
I cannot read the new lines in his face.

Mary lets me iron her crepes and laces;
 I wonder if she thinks that Mother's hands
 Would tear the fine-meshed fabric of her love-dream?
 I wish she knew that Mother understands.

Jack likes the finest nainsook, trim, athletic,
 Next to his skin. Most finical of men,
 How can he bear to waste his time on Gladys?
 I wish he were a little boy again.

Oh, well! My task today is just the ironing;
 But while I iron, I cannot help but pray--
 Dear Lord, please let me smooth my loved ones' pathways;
 Please do not let them drift too far away.

The poet is accorded the following recognition, covering a fairly sizeable space, in American Women, a biographical dictionary of notable women:

Ward, May Williams (Mrs. Merle C. Ward), writer; b. Holden, Mo.; d. George W. and Minnie Sarah (Smith) Williams; m. Merle C. Ward, January 7, 1908; hus. voc. grain bus. Edu. A.B., Univ. of Kans., 1905. Beta Sigma Phi (hon.), Phi Beta Kappa. Pres. occ. Writer. Previously: editor, The Harp (mag. of poetry). Church: Congregational. Politics: Republican. Mem. Poetry Soc. of Am., N.Y.; Poetry Soc. of Kans. (pres. 1932-34); Midland Authors, Chicago; P.E.O., D.A.R., Pres. of Ks. Authors Club, 1940. MacDowell Colony (resident, 1925). Hobbies: Kansas art, making block prints, collection of autographs. Fav. rec. or sport: walking. Author: Seesaw, A book of Verse, 1929; In Double Rhythm (block prints and verse), 1929; From Christmas Time to April, 1938; contributor to leading Am. magazines including Saturday Evening Post, Bookman, Ladies Home Journal, North American Review, Nation, and Commonweal. Address: 301 S. Washington St., Wellington, Kansas.²

Who's Who Among North American Authors contains an inclusive-coverage paragraph concerning May Williams Ward:

Ward, May Williams, editor, writer. b. Holden, Mo.; d. Geo. W. and Minnie (Smith) Williams; educ. Univ. Kansas. Degree: A.B.; m. Merle C. Ward. Author: In Double Rhythm (poems and wood cuts

2. American Women, the Standard Biographical Dictionary of Notable Women, ed. Durward Howes. (1939-40). Los Angeles: American Publications, Inc., 1939, p. 945.

by the author), 1929; Seesaw Poems, 1929; From Christmas Time to April, 1938. Former editor, the Harp, a magazine of poetry. Contributor to Bookman, Forum, Good Housekeeping, Ladies Home Journal, Saturday Evening Post, Poetry, Contemporary Verse, Harp, Country Gentleman, Nation and other mags. General character of writing: poems. Member: Poetry Society of America, MacDowell Colony Ass'n of Members, and Soc. of Midland Authors. Home: Wellington, Kansas.³

The poetry of Mrs. Ward has been more widely published than criticized. The criticism uncovered has proved to be, on the whole, very generous and kind to the poet, although some adverse criticism is included. More criticism of Seesaw is included than of any other book because it was more readily available and is believed to be typical. Among the scores of favorable review of the first book by Mrs. Ward, Seesaw, the following are representative:

Mrs. Ward's verse is beautiful, poignant, understanding.
--William Allen White in the Emporia Gazette.

The quality of human sympathy gives warmth and conviction to this book.

--Harriet Munroe in Poetry.

Perhaps the critic was thinking of the poem "I Remember" as he wrote the following criticism of Seesaw:

Feminine notations, done with compelling economy.
--Harold Vinal in Voices.

I REMEMBER

In the day. . .in the twilight. . .at night. . .
I remember, remember, remember.
In the day, for its glory is light,
Your radiant zest I remember;
And when twilight comes
Like a grey-feathered dove,

3. Who's Who Among North American Authors, ed. Alberto Lawrence. (1936-39). Los Angeles: Golden Syndicate Publishing Co., [c1939], 1045.

Your intimate, quiet moods
 Haunt me. . . And love
 In the night, made for love, I remember,
 Remember, remember, remember.

Louis Meeker enlarges on the theme of the poem "Variously" for his criticism:

An extra large snowflake like an embroidered star, is May Williams Ward's first volume, Seesaw.

--Louis Meeker in the Kansas City Star.

VARIOUSLY

There is a law for snowflakes:
 "Six-sided thou shalt be. . ."
 And every flake obeys it,
 But variously.

So with poets; one they praise,
 BEAUTY. . . in a thousand ways.

Thinking of the poems quoted following this criticism, some critics were impressed more by the characterization apparent in Seesaw.

This book is a portrait gallery. Mrs. Ward's keen visual instinct, proved by her very original woodcuts, is the foundation for most of her poems. Her eyes, lighting upon some human shape, give her the first hint of personality; her imagination acts upon the hint with quick intelligence, and her disciplined technique completes a vivid portrait.

Some of these portraits are swift journalistic drawings--"Book-smart," "The Best Housekeeper," "The Heirloom," "The Optimist" are examples. Others have color and lyric beauty, with a fine searching climax of sorrow or joy wrought without a false or wasted stroke. . . a style reportorially accurate and easy-going in the slighter poems, but rising to a quick and poignant lyricism in the finer ones. Best of these is a touching lyric. . . "My Little Sister."

--Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.

BOOK-SMART

She wasn't used to
 A calico gown
 So she made her husband
 Move to town.

He couldn't find
 A thing to do.
 She went back to teaching.
 She had to.

She always boasted,
 Flirting with her head,
 She'd rather die
 Than scrub, bake bread,
 Raise lots of chickens
 And a family. . . .
 They had one boy
 (Not meant to be)
 Who wouldn't work
 Or go to school.
 His mother was book smart
 But a fool. . . .

THE BEST HOUSEKEEPER IN TOWN

There were newspapers spread
 From table to door
 Lest anyone tread
 On her fresh-scrubbed floor;
 And she polished the windows
 Pane by pane,
 Inside and out, after
 Every rain.

The day was bright
 When they buried her
 But the hearse was a sight--
 One splashy blur
 From yesterday's mud;
 And The News, unread,
 (With her death notice in)
 Fell with the spread
 Sheets on the floor.
 Her husband tripped
 Over them. . . burned them. . . swore
 Tight-lipped.

THE HEIRLOOM

She nags her husband
 That they have no car
 She has lost all track
 Where her sisters are.

Her children are impudent
 And underfed;
 She reads cheap novels
 And buys store bread;
 In leisure moments
 Her fingers fly
 Sewing the widest lace
 She can buy
 On mercerized cottons
 For her cedar chest,
 And putting "lazy-daisy stitch"
 On some, for "best."

The homespun linen
 Her forbears wove
 Is on the kitchen table
 By the rusty stove.

THE OPTOMIST

Well, I wouldn't call it a desert, he said,
 I have a tree!
 I don't see that anyone would need
 To pity me.
 With a fine big cottonwood breading the glare
 Of yellow sky,
 It doesn't seem any more, to stare
 So hot and high.
 And the tree makes, at night when the sheep are fed,
 Some place to go;
 Through it, the stars do not look, he said,
 So hot and low. . . .

When Helen Maring said, "Originality, most notable in striking figures, marks May Williams Ward's poems," she was probably thinking of such poems as "Genius," published in Contemporary Verse in 1925, later in Seesaw, and "Of Poetry," in Seesaw.

GENIUS

Lightning is a crazy
 Witchfired tree.
 All its branches grow
 Too suddenly.

Everyone, almost, prefers
 The oak,

Slow of growth, serene,
Like common folk.

OF POETRY

Only the blossom is palpable, ivory petals
Cupping the essence of dream for waking delight.
Whence it is stemmed is unknowable, hidden its leafing,
Secret the way its long rootlets are webbed through
the white
Stars, and clutched in the soul, and fed on the night. . .

A critical article in the Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina, April 20,
1930, said:

Miss Ward realizes that the adjective is the enemy of the noun,
and that sonorousness is the enemy of the line; and though her
voice is a small one, it is her own voice, even though faintly
reminiscent of Heinrich Heine.

Perhaps because of the poem "My House is Small," quoted in Chapter III,
and "Back Home," a poem of rather trite language that is probably
saved by the unusual use of commonplace phrases such as scuffed leather
and unevenly worn heel, this comment appeared in Contemporary Vision,
January, 1930.

Here we have poems ripened in the sun of maturity, keen and deft
as a butcher's knife, compact with wisdom, pathos and a whimsical
sympathy. . . She is one of our outstandingly modern and indi-
vidual women poets.

BACK HOME

To live is to go on a journey,
To die is to come back home. . .
My shoe soles are thin with wandering,
Sticky with clay and loam;
There are marks of stones and of brambles;
The leather is scuffed and torn;
And I must not have walked quite straight,
I think,
For the heels are unevenly worn.
I shall take off my shoes and sleep and rest.
(If I dream, shall I dream that I roam?)
To live is to go on a journey,
To die is to come back home. . . .

Of Seesaw, Voices printed: "It is a book one reads with constant delight; here is impact; here is conclusiveness." The Kansas City (Mo.) Journal-Post published this statement: "Mrs. Ward's poems have an unforgettable quality that makes them the experience of all that read them." "Decrescendo" and "Let Us Sit Near" are representative of this criticism.

DECRESCENDO

The arc of the moon is waning
 Is smooth as her upward swing.
 Autumn and quiet winter
 Flow gently down from spring.
 Music that swells crescendo
 Till stars to far stars call
 Slips with a throb of beauty
 Into its dying fall.
 Roses are calm through cycles
 Of petal and petal-dust.
 But men grow old resentfully
 And only because they must.

Poetry, Chicago, used this poem by Mrs. Ward in a group of seven. William Allen White once said that "Decrescendo" was one of the few poems with an ironic ending which he liked because it was the truth.

LET US SIT NEAR

Trees are withdrawn in beauty
 Hills in their blue reserve.
 The moon is cool, and finished
 Is her pure and flawless cure.
 They are too perfect. I am
 Broken, beset with fear,
 Struggling, like you. . . For comfort
 Let us sit near, sit near.

In the Marceline (Mo.) News of November 4, 1938, P. Casper Harvey, Head of the English Department of William Jewell College, wrote a review of From Christmas Time to April, in which he said in part:

Mrs. Ward's poetic and critical mind is evident in the variety of her themes. It is often a shrewd and subtle mind and always a high order of integrity is evidenced. There are sheerly magical phrases and a highly sensitive artistic sense is seen in her serious work and in her light. The magical touch is clear in her "Spring Day in Kansas." (quoted earlier in this chapter)

The Daily Herald, Oskaloosa, Iowa, printed on December 16, 1938, of the same book: "Her war poems have a peculiar ironical strength but most of her verse is delicate as the tracery of frost on a window pane." From Christmas Time to April is reviewed by W. S. Johnson in the Kansas University Graduate Magazine in December, 1938:

. . . It is to be expected that Mrs. Ward's verse should fall short of conveying the horror and passionate indignation of a Wilfred Owen or a Siegfried Sassoon. In a few poems, such as "Soldier's Return" and "Words After a Peace," she catches something of their bitterly ironic tone.

Mrs. Ward, however, is not primarily a descriptive or regional poet. She uses description chiefly as background for some delicate fancy or some aphorism of her own. She has a fondness for sententious verse and does this kind of thing well. "Reproach to a Tree," for example, combines both fancy and apothegm.

.
 . . . In a few poems she attains that rare combination of truthfulness to fact, contemplative wisdom, and whimsical humor that we associate with the name of Robert Frost. On the other hand one misses the pungent Robinsonian character sketches that comprise so large a part of her earlier volume, Seesaw.

SOLDIER'S RETURN

Our village was lucky. Of all our lads
 Who played war's game of chance,
 Not one was missing that winter day
 When the boys came home from France.

But Joe was gassed and hollow thin;
 Gay Tommy no more may dance;
 And Bob found war less hard to bear
 Than his sweetheart's pitying glance,
 Though the surgeons made him a face again
 When the boys came home from France.

Young love, oh yes, for most of the boys.

But Joe can never be well,
 And Bob and Tom never looked at the girls
 After they came home from Hell.

WORDS AFTER A PEACE

Do not remember the way of winning.
 Only remember the field is won;
 Blood is requisite for beginning
 Birth or battle. Now war is done.
 (Done?) Put the maimed, war's misbegotten
 Out of our sight in hospitals; lay
 Dead men in graves not quite forgotten--
 Decorate them on Memorial Day.
 Now the victory wreaths be twining,
 Now be happy. (Happy?) Write
 Not red blotches, but silver-shining
 Lying words on a page of white.

REPROACH TO A TREE

I do not blame your trunk, that must look down,
 For taking pattern, in its furrowed brown,
 From earth, rough plowed.
 But branches, with a skyward look to bless
 Should copy sky's essential quietness,
 Not tossing restlessness from every cloud.

Kenneth Porter wrote in Hinterland, in 1939, "The author has a tree obsession." Harriet Munroe suggested to M.W.W. in 1929, "Give more thought to your titles; they should not be generalizations like 'love' or 'strength'; they should not give away the point of your argument; they should not be too fancy." Mrs. Ward herself feels that silence on the part of such magazines as the Saturday Review of Literature in the publishing of her poems is in itself a major adverse criticism.

May Williams Ward received many letters from William Allen White after they became close friends and literary associates, but this is the first letter that she received from him, before she knew him

personally:

. . . I believe you have it. Anyway, the fact that you can sell to Life, the Ladies Home Journal, the Kansas City Star and Judge indicates that smarter men than I know that you have it. Good luck to you, and go ahead--

Mrs. Ward has carried on correspondence with Jesse Stuart, author of Album of Destiny, Man With a Bull-Tongue Plow, Taps for Private Tussie, The Thread That Runs So True. In a letter which she received from him September 21, 1950, he said in part:

It is fine to get a letter from you. I think I told you this that I had heard of you long before you ever heard of me and I never dreamed of ever meeting you. Well, I met you in Kansas. In high school and college I read your poems in the various magazines and knew you by reputation. I have read them, your poems in magazines, since high school days. . . .

And in another which he wrote to her November 13, 1950, he said:

. . . What interested me was in this program that you listed all these flowers. You are the only person I have ever known that did this. Also you made a comparison of the expressions of Kentucky and Kansas. . . You did a thorough job. But after all, when one can write like you, feel like you...You know I have known you for many years...long, long before I ever met you... But really you covered such broad scope on this talk, with all the poems you read, I don't see how you did it. . . .

In letters and notes sent to the poet by friends and literary associates may be found the following comments:

The poems you sent are all so nice I'll be happy to use them "Between the Bookends" within the next few weeks. . . I hope that I may do them justice.

--Ted Malone, January 17, 1933.

Am writing N. Y. Sun use of Back Home. You've done better poetry, but something likeable about it!

--Sherman Ripley

For May Williams Ward, a Belpre sister of Amherst Emily--(Emily Dickinson)

--Braithwaite.

I am rather inclined to think that your Little Sister who died at twenty, will have a very long life--a simple and exquisitely poignant lyric--

--Harriet Munroe.

Seesaw is a charming volume and I have read it with keen interest and much pleasure in its authentic simplicity, its freshness of imagery and its human appeal. Your range of subject matter is wide and significant and I find more concentration on the purely human elements of the book than I had expected. You have not allowed craft to thin emotion, and that is right for poetry that is sincere. . . .

--Glenn Ward Dresbach, December 15,
1929.

There are some exceedingly fine poems in your program, for ex. "Adolescence" to mention just one. We all need foolish and beautiful dreams to be able to live whether we are old or young. You remember this line in Li Po: "Which was the real, the butterfly or the man?"

--Birger Sandzen, June 8, 1938.

ADOLESCENCE

I don't know what I want, but I want something.
I dream sometimes of fairyland delight,
Faint music, dewy grass, great moonlike lanterns.
And dancing figures, white against the night.
I think I'll write a book, on Love and Beauty,
Or go to sea and drift out with the tide.
I don't know what I want, but I want something. . .
I'll try a good big beefsteak, chicken-fried!

When is your book coming out? If not too soon, I'd like this group: "The Proof," "Fellow Travelers," "The Optomist," "Cliches," "Let Us Sit Near," "Decrescendo," and "Sleep Spell." This will make four of our pages. What general title, please, and do you like above order? . . .

H.M. (Harriet Munroe, Editor
Poetry) January 5, 1926.

Hello There:

Just a note to tell you
I saw your picture of "The girl and the flame"
pinned on a wall of an apartment
down near the home of Washington Irving-
the other day.
And then to tell you
I used your little poem "Snowflakes"

as a theme plot for my last Saturday's program.
Incidentally,
I have a glaring weakness for those vividly concise poems
you write
and I wish you would make up a few copies
and send them along.
I'm trying to find the best unpublished poetry in America these days
and when some of the best poets like yourself
do not contribute
I don't know how I can buy the best.

Sincerely,
Ted Malone (Program Director, "Between the Bookends," C.B.S.)

In thirty years, nearly a thousand verses have been published
in over a hundred magazines in addition to the publication of four
books, inclusion in anthologies and textbooks, appearance of numerous
prose articles, dramatic skits, and astute criticisms. May Williams
Ward is indeed a most versatile writer, but is best known for her
poetry.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In a very early verse published in Country Gentleman called "Enigma," May Williams Ward catalogs several kinds of women a girl admires and concludes with these lines:

Which does she want to be most? I'm sure
Not any woman could tell.

Mrs. Ward's eagerness to be a participant in whatever is going on currently has led to a scattering of her energies too much, perhaps, but it also gives a contemporary tone to what she has written through the years. Evidence of her recognition in Kansas may be found in the newspaper files and the personal one on M.W.W. at the State Historical Society at Topeka; in the bound volumes of the Kansas Magazine, in whose indices she appears almost without exception since its revival in 1933; similarly, in the yearbooks of the Kansas Authors Club; in all Kansas Anthologies during her writing life; and in the special files about her in quite a number of college and city libraries. In research at the Library of the University of Kansas, the Alma Mater of the poet, it was found that her file there was much fuller than most of them.

A noncommittal note was sent to representative Kansas editors, college English professors, librarians, and literary associates of M.W.W. asking for a list of the five best practicing poets in Kansas. Almost without exception the name of Mrs. Ward appeared either at the top or near the top of every list. This is another confirmation of

her reputation as a writer of outstanding verse among her Kansas contemporaries. Some of the representative comments concerning Mrs. Ward are given:

Roberta Stout, English Department, Fort Hays Kansas State College:
 "The dominant impression left with me is that she (Mrs. Ward) does rather well with romantic and emotional moments if she isn't drawn into a slight sentimentality. . . . She is lyrical. . . ."

Dr. F. B. Streeter, Librarian, Fort Hays Kansas State College:
 "I would rank Mrs. Ward as the leading Kansas poet and one of the outstanding poets of America. Her poetry deserves that rating. I have followed her work closely for fifteen years or so."

Helen Rhoda Hoopes, Professor Emeritus, Kansas University, and writer:
 "May Williams Ward--most original; high quality; technic excellent; most widely known; ability varied (editor, poet, playwright, speaker.)"

Velma West Sykes, President of Poetry Society of Kansas:
 "May Williams Ward has certainly had as much good poetry published as any practicing poet now living in the state. . . ."

William Allen White's review of Seesaw in the Emporia Gazette, January 25, 1930, states in the Emporia editor's colloquial manner his opinion that Mrs. Ward is the "champion poet of Kansas."

May Williams Ward is a Kansas poet. . . She has something more than a local reputation. She contributes to the most important magazines of verse and is easily the champion poet of Kansas. Her verse is beautiful, poignant, understanding. She excels because she is of the prairie. She takes music out of her environment. . . This volume is the most ambitious and probably the most important volume, and it will have a real place in the poetical output of America. Mrs. Ward is one of the reasons why Kansas is proud.

A letter from Bernice Anderson (Mrs. N. Lyle), Partridge, Kansas, is typical in the expression of regard with which other writers in Kansas view May Williams Ward. Mrs. Anderson has had three books published for children: Topsy Turvy's Pigtails, Topsy Turvy and the Tin Clown, and Indian Sleep-Man Tales. She has also collaborated in

writing three operettas for children. She has written numerous stories, articles, and verse for both children and adults. Her letter follows:

I have known and loved May Williams Ward for nearly twenty-five years. Her active mind and her ability of accomplishment have constantly been an inspiration to me. And her truly magnetic personality has made her a delightful friend, always; she is most able in participating in weighty discussions, yet ever a good listener; an outstanding poet and prose writer, yet always ready to give a helpful boost to others who are farther down the ladder than she. Unprejudiced, generous, kind, she is genuinely interested in her friends and their families; she rejoices in their successes, and is sympathetic over their disappointments and griefs. She has a warm sense of humor. She is a good traveling companion. . . She is a loyal wife and good homemaker, as her Merle will attest.

Her poetry is eloquent with her love of art and music and her deep understanding of people.

With her reputation as an established poet and her ability to continue in this field, May Williams Ward is a person who should have all the time in the world to pursue her writing without interruption. But she has never considered herself above doing menial tasks when they've had to be done, nor does she ever refuse to give help when it is needed in her community, if she is physically able to give it. She insists that this is a part of living. Which explains, I think, why May Williams Ward is a good example of what is known as a well-balanced person.

If this "opinion" is flowery enough to sound like an obituary, I can only say that I am glad it isn't one. I could not give an honest opinion about May without saying what I have said. Naturally, she could not be human without having some faults. But why bother about finding faults in an individual who has so many, many good points?

Evidence of her recognition outside Kansas is only less plentiful in Missouri, her birth state, in their Historical Society and other libraries. Missouri newspapers, particularly the Kansas City Star, have made note of her activities and printed or reprinted her verses, book reviews, and feature stories. In fact, M.W.W. said in answer to a query, that the extent of her recognition probably coincides roughly with the Star's coverage through the Middle West, and its influence in the East.

The volume of comment on this writer is much less in other sections of America, naturally, than in her own. But there has been recognition in every section of America, including Hawaii and Alaska, and in parts of England, as detailed in another chapter of this thesis. Clifford Gessler in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, January 11, 1930, said, "We'd like to quote. . . "The Best Housekeeper in Town" for its incisive irony. . . . "Fellow Travelers" for its penetrating sympathy. . . subtle rhythms in "The Tree of Iron." The recognition by poem publication has been greater than by critical analyses of her books. In the great centers furthest away from her home, though as has been seen, when reviews are made by strangers afar, the tone of appreciation is the same and adverse criticism is equally hard to find. M.W.W. is a Kansas poet primarily, but an American poet, too, looking at America and the world and at the implications of what Kansas and America and the world are doing, and thinking. With only an amateur's approach to poetry as an adjunct to her life as a whole, nevertheless her urge to create has resulted in a large body of verses, many of which--even among the earliest--are continually being quoted and reprinted.

A letter from A.M. Sullivan, President of the Poetry Society of America and an Executive for Dunn and Bradstreet, gives evidence of the national reputation of the poet:

Blessed is the poet who has roots in the land. May Williams Ward's poetry reflects the wealth of the wide horizons of the prairie land, and the strange loneliness and heartbreak that go with the life of the pioneer. In spite of all of the intellectual turmoil among the "ivory tower" poets, it is the poets of the land who are really doing a job for the tradition of American poetry, and much of their work will survive when the "ivory tower" poets blow away from their intellectual dust bowls.

The poet has a responsibility to his audience, and I think that May Williams Ward has always recognized this in her poems which convey precise ideas and images with an economy of words. Her work is marked by excellent nature observation and accurate use of nature's terminology. Possibly the strongest point of her poetic gift is the sense of affirmation which is found in every poem - a fine philosophy without didacticism, a strong faith without preaching.

Miss Ward also deserves credit for her work on behalf of poets and poetry as an editor and critic, always exhibiting a willingness to share the esthetic pleasures of poetry with others less gifted but nonetheless appreciative.

It seems a fair conclusion to say that May Williams Ward has been shown to be a regional poet in top rank in the Midwest and well and favorably known among special audiences throughout the nation and further, audiences that follow the choices of Mrs. Ward's verses made by editors of magazines and newspapers of many shades of opinion and published from New York to Texas. Her membership in the Poetry Society of America and the MacDowell Colony attest to her national reputation, while her activities in the Kansas Poetry Society and Kansas Authors Club, and her editorship in both the Harp and Kansas Magazine reflect the regard with which she is held in Kansas. The acceptance of four of her books for publication reflect the opinion of the reading public and publishers.

Mrs. Ward's popularity is evident in the mail which comes her way each day. During one day in which she was being interviewed for information to be used in this thesis, her mail contained two letters from Wichita and one from Salina asking coaching help; a new book to review; a letter from a high school girl in East Lansing, Michigan, asking the poet to describe "a typical day's work" and to define "duties of a writer;" letters from poet-friends in several states,

including one from Jesse Stuart of Riverton, Kentucky; a manuscript sent in for Kansas Magazine by a contributor who had not heard that Mrs. Ward resigned from duties with them this year, though she is still on the masthead as Contributing Editor; confirmation of a date to confer with some Wichita writers; and a verse magazine, Talaria, containing a long-delayed poem "Calendar" by M.W.W. There were none of her manuscripts either accepted or rejected in evidence. It was explained that marketing chores are done in spurts and sometimes at long intervals, between duties and pleasures that seem more pressing. When on a marketing spree, May reports that her poems sometimes make several or many trips before finding an editor who wants to buy, so that proportion of returned manuscripts to thin letters with checks is badly one-sided. Still, the checks do come, and letters from editors continue to make their appearance.

The poetry of May Williams Ward has a fine lyrical quality. A poem is written as a response to a unified stimulus, is brief, has unity, is approached from a subjective viewpoint, has a musical quality, and is characterized by deep and sincere feeling. Her poetry has the thought and ring of authenticity. There are poems that middle-western readers can understand and in which they identify their own attitudes and life designs as well as truly pictured background material--scenes familiar in their everyday lives. Mrs. Ward's personality is reflected in the sincere, straightforward, and honest emotions expressed in her poems. She excels in both characterization and description as has been shown in the analysis of her poems in preceding chapters.

M.W.W.'s subject matter has been unpredictable from the start, since her interest is not channelled in any one direction. Her style, however, has changed from effervescence in the twenties, through experimentation with many styles, some of them imitative, in the thirties, and in the last decade to a more individual expression. The qualities of her style are: (1) logical arrangement of thought; (2) the choice of words appropriate in physical sound to the meaning; (3) care in transitions; (4) an increasing use of symbolism and obtaining of effects through suggestion; (5) brevity; (6) marked rhythm and musical flow in both metrical and freer forms; and (7) intensification at the point of climax.

In the biographical and later chapters it has been established by internal evidence in quoted poems and by interviews that May's happy home life as a child and happy marriage influenced her writing toward optimism and normalcy. The definitely literary bent of her maternal Grandfather Smith and his love of books made a deep early impression. The musical and artistic leanings of her family on both sides and the different manifestations of their talents encouraged her own. The dry humor and penetrating comments of her husband, Merle Ward, who is noted for them, certainly have helped her own sense of humor. He has been squarely behind his wife in the indulgence of her bent toward writing, and everything M.W.W. produces is read to him first.

As a beginner, May was generously helped by Mrs. Cora G. Lewis of Kinsley, an editor's wife who had traveled widely, knew many persons of prominence, and saw that the young people of her section who leaned toward any of the arts were given a chance to find out their abilities.

Through her the poet met the persons mentioned earlier and may others who lent her books, was given an opportunity to become a member of the MacDowell Colony, and found many other aspects of an enriched life.

A lifetime habit of reading voraciously started with the classics before May was ten, went through the Louisa M. Alcott phase, and then through the time when literally everything in the small town library at Osawatomie was checked out. By the time she was graduated from high school at sixteen, the rather-read-than-anything habit was firmly fixed and persistent. The Spooner Library at the University of Kansas and those of several professors offered new treasures which opened vistas to deeper thought. After marriage, Mrs. Ward explored the field of contemporary writing for the first time, and in each year since, the still voracious reading of M.W.W. has been mainly contemporary. The quality and number of magazines taken by the Wards has increased with their interests. When asked about what had influenced her most of all, Mrs. Ward unhesitatingly said it was her reading, which has acquainted her with personalities of infinite variety against their different backgrounds, and so opened her eyes to her own background and the people in it. And further, it has caused her to appropriate as her own any background and any person into whose scenes and thoughts she could enter imaginatively. Hearing the Bible read at the table through childhood can still stand up as the most all-pervading influence felt from all the world of books.

May Williams Ward's philosophy of life is not a definitely formulated one. She says that what she is and what she believes certainly shows in her writings, as well as what she knows or believes other

persons are or do. She is an optomist, but can see portents as well as the next one. With her great interest in all kinds of people and their place in the scheme of life, she would like to merit the appellation, Understander. With no organized promotion behind her, without even regular habits of writing and marketing, her work has found a recognized place in the periodical literature of these thirty years and a warm and continued remembering in the hearts of her readers. That memorability of her poetry may be expected to solidify and increase her already considerable reputation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Book

The North America Book of Verse. New York: Henry Harrison, 1939.

Kansas Section, ed. Edna Becker.

An anthology of poems.

Periodicals

Ward, May Williams, "Prairies and Poets," Community Arts and Crafts Magazine, LI(February, 1928), 14, 19.

Use of the prairie as poetic material.

Ward, May Williams, "What Types of Verse Sell Best?" The Author and the Journalist, (January, 1939), p.8.

Newspapers

Harvey, Victoria Unruh, "Achievements of Mrs. Ward Marked by Versatility,"

The St. Louis Star, August, 1927.

An interview with Mrs. Ward.

Dodge City Globe, May 20, 1933.

An interview with May Williams Ward.

Manuscript

Ward, May Williams, "Autobiographical Notes." Unpublished notes toward an autobiography.

Personal Interview

Ward, May Williams, Wellington, Kansas, May, 1950; August, 1950; and April, 1951.

Told of facts concerning her life, publications, and poetic theories.

Reference Books

American Women, the Standard Biographical Dictionary of Notable Women, ed. Durward Howes. (1939-40). Los Angeles: American Publications, Inc., 1939, p. 945.

Biographical information.

Who's Who Among North American Authors, ed. Alberto Lawrence. (1936-39). Los Angeles: Golden Syndicate Publishing Co., [1939], 1045.

Biographical information.