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## UA68/6/2 Voices, Vol. VI, No. 2

Western Writers

Cecil Richard Oakley

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WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY  
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Fall-Winter, 1961

**Voices**



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#### DEDICATION

The members of WESTERN WRITERS and the staff and patrons  
of VOICES magazine dedicate this edition  
of VOICES to the memory of  
RICHARD OAKLEY,  
whose collected poetry and  
prose constitute this issue.

#### REQUIEM

(Richard Oakley, November 4, 1961)

There is nothing left to say of death.  
All . . . every word and phrase, and every angry metaphor . . .  
There is nothing that has not been said before.

Now that it is done, all memory is past  
And we can add no more. Rejoice in what you knew of him  
And do not mourn. Let there be no praise, nor blame,  
No childish condemnation of the gods, no speculation, nor excuse.

But let us laugh as if we did not care at all,  
Drink one last toast to this dead friend  
And smash our glasses down against the wall.

Sue Taylor Grafton

WHEN SOMETHING FAIR AND PRECIOUS PASSES

When something fair and precious passes, fold  
The pain of passing 'round you. Clutch with greed  
The heavy, hirsute garment—crimp the cold  
Dark cloth on red and angry flesh. Now feed  
Austerely, taking pale and frugally  
Your bread for meat and tepid water, wine.  
So fix your soul, wallow voluptuously  
In pain of parting, rub your wound with brine.  
Do these things, so learning that, once galled,  
The heart will ache less sharply. Sweetly dimmed  
And gentle is the episode recalled—  
With pleasant, nurtured pain the cup is brimmed.  
Do this, and take you for a staff this fact:  
The memory is more than worth the act.

I WOULD THAT IN SOME PLACID PART OF ME

I would that in some placid part of me,  
Inert of thought and ignorant of Hell,  
In peace unpandered (if, indeed, such be),  
I would that in such places you might dwell.  
But I, who drew from bitter tears a tart  
And arid jest, am helpless here: I bring  
To certain secret corners of my heart  
Not peace, nor rest, nor any tranquil thing.  
So must you go: begone, as birds will fly,  
Should Autumn air invade sweet summertime,  
The limb that bore them, lest of Death they die. . . .  
Stay not: seek now a more congenial clime.  
And should you leave, I would bid that you be  
But this: unfettered, in your flight, of me.

FEAR, THAT DARK AND HEAVY VESSEL

Fear, that dark and heavy vessel, slides  
Insidiously into view; yes, soon or late,  
It brims each man's horizon. Low it glides,  
And having for its navigator, Hate,  
It moves swift-oared and ominously full  
With a malodorous cargo. Not by these:  
The placid deck, the innocent deep hull,  
Are we alarmed; we know within the lees  
That writhing, black-limbed power, cuts the prow  
Inexorably, so obscuring reason  
As a course, or all reflection how  
One circum-navigates his storm in season.  
Still, I can but marvel; curiously,  
We dread the ship, yet always seek the sea.

THOUGH SOME CRY FOLLY, I CALL THIS THING WISE

Though some cry folly, I call this thing wise:  
To say that, when your sweet propinquity  
Is shared by me no more, and through no guise  
Might I play host with hope for company—  
To say, in simple shrugs, it matters not . . .  
Though two have touched and turned in diverse ways,  
No cities shall decay, nor vineyards rot  
As a result. And should our later days  
Be less that fair, what of it? Lesser men  
Have lived with less and lived, it seems, content.  
So if you love me, I would bid you then  
To seek no noble thread in my intent:  
He that would soften anguish, must then prize  
By that much less the love he spurns with lies.

NEVER, NEVER MAY IT BE SAID OF ME

Never, never may it be said of me  
That I, even when fully flown with drink,  
Past prudence, passing yet civility;  
Did speak of certain secret things I think  
To hold inviolate. Not even you  
May wheedle from me what I harbor so:  
Why, I would sooner walk through virgin dew,  
Or scatter sooty cinders in the snow!  
No Bluebeard I, but surely there should be  
One chamber wherein chary me may keep  
Forever, from gross fingers, Verity,  
So cloistered: kept alive, yet kept asleep.  
So shall no man, not now, nor ever hence,  
Destroy with but one touch my sole defense.

THE BOOK

When first I viewed the Book, through callow eyes,  
I marked it thus: Here, splendid deeds were done!  
I marveled that He pinned back flimsy skies,  
Or harbored in His palm a potent sun.  
As time unloosed my scales, I inched through pages  
Seeking those who, while unsanctified,  
Spoke eloquently to the diverse ages,  
Bracing men in whom all hope had died.  
O cruel wrench! How harsh, and subtle, too,  
When volumes labelled Reason paled the Book,  
And urged the day when nothing else would do  
But I should shed my faith. If now I look,  
Dark wonder meets my gaze. I stand, a bare  
Agnostic, hollow with a want of prayer.

YOUR BEAUTY BLINDS ME NOT

Your beauty blinds me not. I can endure  
To stand before you—needing not to turn  
From left to right, nor needing for a cure  
A shaded, filtered sight—what I discern  
I dare discern in full. Though folly, I  
Shall swear that, should your radiance  
Strike each beholder blind, sear every eye  
To blankness; I would take a furtive glance  
With muscles moved in gasps, to see your face.  
But your beauty, impotent to excite  
My direst pain, has yet a sweeter grace . . .  
One which illumines, but which does not destroy.  
Since more than this no mortal may enjoy,  
I seek your subtle grays, and shun the light.

SONNET TO K\_\_\_\_\_

Yours is not the grace of others, no;  
And not for you a gentle lady's preening—  
Boldness sheathed in stealth, you come and go,  
With deeds done singly, manifold in meaning.  
Lean of body, taut but delicate,  
You are a prowling doubt in wisdom's womb—  
Voluptuously planed, so proving that  
In contradiction, unity finds room.  
Let others chide at change, let moon and menses  
Make them sulk or prink, no matter. You  
Have lit your changeling fire, obscured my senses,  
Curdled sweet belief; still this stands true:  
    The prim, the pale, the constant and the meek—  
    So worthy—yet, with you close by, so bleak.

SONNET TO D\_\_\_\_\_

I, having been surrounded all my days  
By ordinary things and colors plain,  
Find, therefore, much to marvel at and praise  
In you, whose lazy, lambent eyes disdain  
A metaphor in green; nor is compare  
In curling petals of the rose, for less  
Are they than your soft lips . . . And by your hair  
The raven's wing turns rusty, lustreless.  
Since you incarnate all that is Delight,  
And make my keenest phrase a blunted tool;  
I shall not speak as wisely as I might,  
But as a child, or as—perhaps—a fool,  
    Or any man whose eyes see what I see:  
    “You are all this, and all this pleases me.”



WE SHALL—SOME DISTANT DAY—NOT SOON, MY DEAR

We shall—some distant day—not soon, my dear;  
In some sweet season, some exotic clime,  
Some clean but craggy slope where snows appear—  
Shall meet again, perhaps . . . all in good time,  
Though I have lost you (having once been taught  
That those who lose do so with grace), I smile  
And hope knowing full well that hope is naught,  
And hope unfed will someday turn to bile.  
I shall not say: "Remain forever fair!"  
Nor shall I beg, as others often do,  
That you be constant. Knowing that you bear  
No ill for me is all I ask of you.

Remember of me not that I await,  
But that I loved, and cannot learn to hate.

ONCE MORE THERE SWEEPS INTO MY DUSTY MIND

Once more there sweeps into my dusty mind,  
Like faint perfume of mint, or like the dew  
That daily is at dawn distilled anew;  
Your memory—and once again I find  
Myself susceptible; no anodyne  
There be whence urgently I must pursue  
Such thoughts as threaten to disturb, undo  
The difficult-won peace I thought was mine.  
Wherefore we parted, well I know; yet how  
Slivers of doubt prick at my solitude!  
They titillate and tease this busy brow  
Till I, seeing they will not be subdued,  
Can say but this: though you may enter now,  
You were not asked to come, and you are rude.

IF I MAY HARVEST NOT YOUR LOVE

If I may harvest not your love, then I  
Shall harvest other passions from your heart.  
So shall you pay for your inconstant eye  
And some accounts long due shall be, in part,  
Redeemed by me who never knew before  
The taste of sweet revenge. First, I shall stroke  
The oily fingers of deceit, then soar  
To heady heights on words my justice spoke.  
This being done and, being satisfied,  
I shall sit silently and watch and wait;  
Knowing full well because of me love died,  
And left in grim decay the corpse of hate.

This you shall learn, and from this shall be wise:  
That one must love before he may despise.

WHEREFORE AT LENGTH DO I

Wherefore at length do I, who, loving less  
Than most unlovely things, dull discontent;  
Continue with your love? Not east nor west  
May offer peace to me that, spurred and spent,  
Pursue but phantoms, following folly's guide.  
Now fully drained of deeds am I, not dreams;  
Thus girded, I shall not soon cast aside  
The truly fair for that which fairer seems.  
So goes my argument. Now, I shall say,  
It may be so that sanely, wearily—  
Harking to Reason—I might turn away,  
Relinquishing what I know cannot be.

But till such time arrive, still will I chase  
The ghost that sped but once across your face.

IN CERTAIN SONGS THAT ARE AS YET UNSUNG

In certain songs that are as yet unsung,  
I shall declare our love. Articulate,  
I shall say lovely things of you, shall prate,  
And endlessly, of things that I, when young,  
Bespoke so poorly—though I be of lung  
Near-drained, no matter; still will I abate  
Not soon—well-woven words will inundate  
Our love like raining jewels still un-strung.  
But now I find myself so ill-equipped,  
So poorly spoken, I must hold my peace:  
The phrases I would find, they slide and shift,  
Elude my grasp until I can but cease  
And put aside the itching pen I lift,  
So full of what I cannot yet release.

SOMEDAY, WITH SONGS THAT NOW ARE UNDER-SUNG

Someday, with songs that now are under-sung,  
I shall declare our love—shall inundate  
With words like fretted jewels; then abate  
Not ever: for, 'tis then my thickened lung  
Shall find a voice—not with a youthful tongue,  
Perhaps; but one full-grown, articulate . . .  
Therefore, forget what I say now and wait,  
For truest tributes come not from the young.  
Today, I am so mute, so ill-equipped,  
So poorly-spoken, I must hold my peace:  
The fertile phrase I seek slips now adrift,  
Eludes my grasp until I needs must cease  
And put aside the itching pen I lift,  
So full of what I cannot yet release.

SINCE YOU EXPRESS SURPRISE THAT THIS PROUD HEART

Since you express surprise that this proud heart  
Should now be brought ignobly to the dust;  
That once did, in disdain and shrewd disgust,  
Avoid or render blunt Love's keenest dart—  
Since you express surprise, savoring your tart  
Yet not unwelcome triumph, and needs must  
Return, not without relish, thrust for thrust—  
Proceed: demand your due: be paid, in part.  
But there is this: though you may give in kind,  
Few reckonings there be that balance right  
By giving ill for ill. In this, I find  
Good reason to believe your sturdy sight  
Shall soon perceive (though it may now be blind)  
That victories won so can be but slight.

NOT YET OBSCURED BY TIME

Not yet obscured by time, still unobscured  
By days spent foolishly, in fevered haste,  
Hoping to scatter thoughts too long endured;  
Your memory remains—not yet erased.  
From task to task I turn, and find no peace,  
Nor is there solace in a silent place;  
And chambers wherein laughter finds release  
I must avoid, lest I recall your face.  
So, worn of body, weary and unsound,  
From place to place I turned my troubled head;  
Until, at length, believing I had found  
One spot too strange for memory, I said:  
"At last, the ghost is laid!" Then sudden pain—  
The thought of you—assailed me once again.

WELL I REMEMBER, AND AS WELL REGRET

Well I remember, and as well regret,  
How stolidly you spoke, devoid of zest,  
Saying, "Though this be cruel, this is best:  
Our love is dead, lay it to rest: forget."  
Knowing the candid way is kind, I fret  
Not on your motive—rather, my distress  
Is not that you gave tongue to what I guessed,  
But that some questions are unanswered yet.  
I know not wherefore, nor do I know where  
Our love first faltered, thence to ail and die:  
So help me now unriddle my despair:  
Did you destroy this fragile thing? Did I?  
Or did its death we jointly bring to bear?  
In vain I beg, moist-eyed, while yours are dry.

AS CHILLY DEW DECLARES THE FIRST FAINT AIR

As chilly dew declares the first faint air  
Of Autumn, so your tears, though few, foretell  
The close of our sweet summer—full and fair  
Though these days be, they shall fare hence unwell.  
The same is every season: unaware,  
Surprised by things too gradual to be seen,  
I start to see a sudden branch gone bare  
That was but lately laden with rich green.  
Think not that, with familiarity,  
The ache that comes of seeing such will fade:  
Such repetition since has proved, for me,  
Poor preparation. 'Tis as if I said:  
"This viper is not strange." For all my wit,  
Still would the fang be felt, whereon it bit.

YOUR FACE I SHALL FORGET

Your face I shall forget, and soon, I pray:  
Your photos from the album I have ripped,  
And friends we had in common yesterday  
Are mine no more—I have cut them adrift.  
All things reminding me of you are gone—  
The little book that you inscribed and signed—  
I have examined all, upturned each stone,  
Lest any trace of you be left behind.  
Yes, you are forgotten; save for your smile  
Which I see now, before me; and your eyes,  
In which a look of love stood for a while—  
Your absence is in fact—my fancy lies:  
Your images are gone—yet I would fain  
Learn how one shatters pictures in the brain.

YOUR STERILE HEART, WELL-MASKED FOR MANY DAYS

Your sterile heart, well-masked for many days—  
Concealed behind a frivolous facade,  
Beneath a voice which glides with false glissade—  
Is now perceived by my most merciless gaze.  
Once I, perusing, sensed a certain phrase  
Struck sour in your sweet but thin aubade;  
Then in the tepid tick of Afterward,  
I saw the sum of all your arid days:  
The feigned delight of your synthetic love.  
But this I know: that time shall later prove  
(While stifled longings shrewdly chew and tear  
At shredded nerves) that I would have you still;  
And little matters then my thought that fair  
Words you sing sweetly, I should hear so ill.

SHALL SLEEP ALONE REPAIR THIS CRUEL REND

Shall sleep alone repair this cruel rend,  
That neither drug nor drink made whole for me?  
First, I need find some wiser way to fend  
Off certain nights I now spend sleeplessly:  
Harking to hear the turgid hours tick  
And, being eased of anguish in no wise;  
At length, with nails bit at the very quick,  
I see the sallow dawn with gritty eyes.  
How foolish they, that yet hold this belief:  
That sleep may somehow mend a man his ache,  
Or weave a cloth with which to cover grief . . .  
Sleep gives no solace: I remain awake;  
    And, as one that in thirst burns for a stream,  
    I long for sleep—yet greatly dread to dream.

UNLIKE MOST OTHERS IN NO WISE

Unlike most others in no wise, this dawn  
Pervades my room and I, from habit, rise  
And move about with laggard limbs and yawn . . .  
My daily drop of mercy is that eyes,  
When robbed of recent sleep and unalert,  
See not too swiftly then. But all too soon,  
The harsh glare of your absence strikes its curt  
Unwelcome beam full on my face, and noon  
There never was that shone more fiercely. So  
All mornings are because we parted—days  
Are spun with endless instants, giving no  
Respite save sleep's anesthetizing glaze;  
    Until from grief this last retreat I take:  
    That morning come when I shall not awake.

SONNET TO PERSEPHONE

Complain, cavil away, but never seek  
My sympathetic ear, Persephone:  
I too have trod your way and, being weak,  
Have plucked the innocent anemone  
To fling aside the bloom in sharp concern  
And flee in tear-stung tumult, knowing not  
In flight which way my troubled soul to turn.  
Not only is in Hell the pitiable lot  
Of lovers—passion's passionless demise—  
Perceived; so have I seen it here, and so  
It shall be seen by others in reprise—  
A tragedy grown stale, a common woe.  
    Beseech me not then, nor to me complain:  
    Your tale is old; in mine is novel pain.

SONNET TO CLIO

Consider, Clio, me: for I can find  
No clue to this accursed Present, whence,  
Most boldly, Evil be applauded, lined,  
Fearful and foul, on either hand, and thence  
Shall be accepted—so I must suppose.  
Not Good, nor even Good's facsimile  
Bides with us here—thus even is the rose  
Uprooted, shredded, shorn—by Industry.  
We talk of progress . . . what progress be made  
When we no more play on the Pipe with Pan;  
And of what prospect be our Man and Maid,  
Who live so ill the lives they ill began?

Consider Thou me: that I yield not yet  
To that which will be worse—what we beget.

SONNET TO ERATO

Erato I have sought and, having found  
Her wanting—not in one, in many ways—  
I shall heed not Her now-no-more sweet sound,  
Nor mark what sly and subtle thing She says.  
O, She was clever—She deceived in full  
Not me alone—O, many, many more:  
That brighter men (or men, at least, less dull)  
Now say, as I do, "Would I knew before!"  
In sooth, my sole regret is this: I learned  
Not through the tricky mind, inured to pain;  
But with the heart this wisdom was discerned,  
And each thick lancet-throb shall stab again.

Still, there be this, that You may now not see:  
The victim may, in time, the victor be.

SONNET TO CALLIOPE

O mighty, chordal Thou, Calliope!  
As many men as have heard Thee before,  
Shall hear Thee hence and, contrapuntally,  
Shall harmonize, mold melody, and soar!  
This being so, then fear Thou not of me—  
Thy most minute, most mean of supplicants,  
Resolves become infirm through vanity!  
No vanity, however vast, supplants  
Thy infinite, laminate—layered lore.  
Could we be not but dazzled—we of dim  
And narrow sight—by what was done before?  
How fit, how just that Thou be over them . . .  
For, with the contra-throated Thou nearby,  
The Eight sound as but one faint, flute-like sigh.

SONNET TO MELPOMENE

Well though I marked grave Melpomene, still  
Do I distrust Her melancholy pose,  
Had Hercules not humors two: one ill—  
One happy? Be not tempered so all souls?  
Be all, it seems, save She that bears His club . . .  
Yet still I disbelieve: for who alive  
Cannot, in greatest gloom, some giddy rub  
Reveal if he but look from every side?  
And who, in sorrow and of laughter sparse,  
Will not, when so provoked, forbear to grin?  
Grave Melpomene, you do mask a farce—  
True Tragedy has wit enough within.

So trouble not to take offense at me:  
For I find jest in all—even Thee.

## THE FOUR SEASONS

Four seasons fade and fold apart  
To separate and tear  
The noiseless rooms walled in my heart . . .  
And still no fear is there;

For in each chamber lives a truth:  
A wintry maxim here,  
And there? . . . a springing seed, whose youth  
Was washed by one wild tear;

Then gently will the summer sun  
Displace the present gloom,  
To wait and watch the reaping done  
And feed a final bloom.

The seasons tell me this: that each  
Turn of the year brings rest  
And strength anew to heal a breach  
In some four-chambered breast;

And each within its own, apart,  
May fuse the four and weld  
A talisman for some tired heart—  
But one that's learned, not felt.

## SUMMER

I'll have no more of Summer; not this one  
Nor any still to come, should they be fair  
Or ill, no matter; summers all have done  
With me and I with them. And still the spare  
Proportions of a crippled year I'll take  
(And gladly, too!) before I reap regret.  
The seed that you made sterile, yours to make  
Anew; no fruit is mine, nor mine the debt.  
With bitter mirth, I watch the eye of noon,  
Which, turning, labels you of all least kind:  
In leaving, Summer, knew you not how soon  
A heart congealed would seek a cooler clime?  
(Now, Sun: because I mock your gentle gaze,  
Please punish me with searing summer's blaze!)

## AUTUMN

Gaunt Autumn holds for me not awe, nor fear,  
For I have learned that Time, which folds and flies,  
Can better do without untimely tears.  
Relentlessly it moves, and all our sighs  
For that which was can only serve to dull  
The sharper zest in that which is to come;  
And backward eyes will prove the man a fool  
Who bears a burden when he might have none.  
So let your dying summers die unmourned,  
And sing no songs of sad and wan regret:  
No Winter be that blows not to be borne,  
Nor Autumn which does not some Spring beget.  
One final word to those who mock my youth:  
If these be lies, then give me not the truth!

## WINTER

I, who in my hapless childhood shrank  
Instinctively from cold and felt its thrust  
As, armed with guile and ice, it sought to yank  
And rout my civil pith of warmth; I must  
Draw from those blinking years this homely fact:  
A broken trust can cast a deeper chill  
And sharper, stiff discomfort tends the act.  
Then I, despite this wintry wisdom, still  
Did give and give and count my heart as more;  
Until (receiving always vows grown false)  
The narrow years did make my heart's last door  
Draw shut: Now safe am I at last from loss.

So blow my Winter cold, or merely cool,  
I curse it still for proving me a fool.

## SPRING: TO NAN

When Spring spreads wide its tokens bright, as coins  
(Which wink and glitter cleanly in the sun),  
Or stirs a sweet tumescence in the loins  
(Which speaks of life lain dormant, not undone);  
When primal pulse unmask a re-born mirth,  
A renaissance of love; why should I babble  
Giddy homage to a fertile earth?  
Such travesty I spurn: the unclean rabble,  
Genuflecting, thinking to give boons  
To that which needs no favor. Spring, I say,  
Is more—why, even gritty city rooms  
Can spawn a Spring, and it not even May.

So why need I give empty rites their due?  
My Spring, in four fair seasons, lives in you.

## NO MODERN MAN MAY SUFFER OVER-MUCH

No modern man may suffer over-much.  
The current anodynes deftly delay  
Immediacy of pain; examples being such  
As jumbled notes of jazz dazzlingly played  
(If one would ease his grief by gramophone),  
Or failing this, a panacea lies,  
Perhaps, in laughter: public or alone,  
A griddy deed provides a good disguise.  
Should even this exquisite opiate  
Prove insufficient, for a modest fee  
One may, with highly touted drugs, abate  
All anguish . . . Modern though our methods be,  
The ailment is antique—if truth be told,  
Both love and pain are ever new and old.

## I WALK, WHERE NONE MAY WATCH ME, IN THIS WOOD

I walk, where none may watch me, in this wood,  
And wear a ruined rose upon my breast;  
Delighting that the Autumn lately brewed  
A beauty all its own, a special zest.  
In burnished blooms I find no tragedy—  
Knowing wherefore that such must fade and die,  
This I can bear with equanimity,  
And no remorse in mine, nor guilt have I.  
From many fallow winters heretofore,  
That fume the fusty mind and freeze the flesh,  
From even such chilly and meager store  
Have I this harvest: hope springing afresh  
That you and Spring return, as one, together,  
Then shall we laugh at this unfriendly weather!

IT IS TODAY THE VOGUE TO CAST ASIDE

It is today the vogue to cast aside  
And thus devaluate, with shrug and sneer,  
Or label quaint, outmoded, *passee*, queer;  
Such words as fail to dazzle or excite—  
With brutal, gross device—the appetite;  
That churls may chuckle heavily and jeer  
At fanciful phrases no more held dear,  
No more regarded—save as dullness they indite.  
Yet still do I enjoy this arid jest:  
That those who now deride the fusty dead—  
The sonneteer, the classicist, the bard—  
Have yet from their unsolid pens to wrest  
One vulgar pun, one word so neatly said  
As can be found in that which they discard.

FROM CERTAIN FOREIGN PHRASES LEARNED BEFORE

From certain foreign phrases learned before,  
The lesson lately culled therein, I find,  
Lay not in words swapped through the nimble mind . . .  
**Limpidamente** means that now no more  
May I this hollow heart hope to restore,  
Nor nourish, nor re-kindle hence, in kind,  
What I so sadly spurned—this dim design  
Shall so remain, unchanged, forevermore.  
I shall no longer fret with foreign tongues  
Yet still will I some meager comfort gain:  
For I perceive poor purpose there; and no  
More need I breathe into my temperate lungs  
Alien air when I, to make it plain,  
Shall shrug and say: "De nada . . . como no?"

YOUR AGE AND GRACE ILLUME YOU WELL

Your age and grace illumine you well. Slow-paced  
And tranquil; printed face from faded die,  
Yet strangely clean—thus proving it untraced,  
We pray, by cruel chisels. You, not I,  
Can read the transitory heart, the clouded  
Mind, the empty deeds of man—perceiving  
Ever a sublimity well-shrouded,  
Lodged (or locked) within—with Him receiving.  
Full aware am I of you, and filled  
With asking of your gracious measure one lone  
Favor here—one dram of wisdom spilled.  
Relate how one, through truth, becomes full-grown.  
So stood the crux. She speaks now, so replying:  
"Work. Then love, then proudly bear the dying."

How tedious is the sonnet!  
And to me unfathomable  
Why one should labor on it  
When he would rather dabble  
Elsewhere.



## FOUR PIN-PRICKS

### I

#### AFTER HEARING TOO MANY LOVE-LYRICS

Love may flirt in gingham hem,  
Or glitter in brocade;  
She gambols in a grassy glen,  
Or languishes in shade;

No stars will match her eyes, no dove  
Is whiter than her hands;  
(And not one poet says that Love  
Dwells chiefly in the glands.)

### II

#### OUTCOME

High Tragedy shall not endow  
Us with awesome finality;  
No, we shall die (as things go now)  
Of epic triviality.

### III

#### REBUTTAL

Other poets sprawl on pages,  
Give no heed to rules;  
Thinking, surely, they are sages  
Loosening wisdom's spools.

As for me, I mind the margins,  
Spit my words out terse;  
Never begging any pardons—  
But I write only verse.

### IV

#### THE PERFECT WEIGHT

If I could tilt Life's scale, this brittle  
Balance would I clutch;  
To drink of Hate, but not too little  
Nor taste of Love too much.

## TECHNOLOGY HAS IN ITS TOWER

Technology has in its tower  
The rod of all our grief.  
The human race, a dwindling power,  
No more commands-in-chief.

If Christ Himself could walk this vale  
And re-enact His Loss,  
Technology would still prevail:  
He'd pack a plastic cross.

## RELENTLESS HUNTSMAN

Relentless huntsman, tell us, pray,  
What guide you take to track  
Your quarry? Have you hounds that bay  
And strain the leash's slack?

Or does an eager falcon, fierce,  
Unerringly, without support,  
First spy the prey, then quickly pierce  
The sky with his report?

Proud huntsman, I would first advise  
A sharp-eyed turn at allegory.  
There, you find, the lesson lies  
In those who track the quarry.

## HE WHO LAUGHS

Self-expungement is the plan—  
A bitter, sterile bloom.  
Presumptuously, the race of man  
Usurps God's Day of Doom.

But when the wheel has fully turned  
To point its fatal spoke,  
How many men will then discern  
God's one titanic joke?

WHAT GILDED VICEROY OF PERU

What gilded viceroy of Peru,  
What proud-plumed prince of Siam,  
What sultan, swathed in silk of blue,  
Is pleased so, as I am?

What medieval king or knight,  
For all his purple pomp,  
Could know the edge of our delight  
As we sublimely romp?

But should our love become less fond, or  
Fade (as do all things),  
How quickly would I then, I wonder,  
Scorn to change with kings?

WHAT SPINDLY THINGS ARE WORDS

What spindly things are words to frame  
The structure of a soul.  
The best of man is still but lame  
And pale beside his goal.

The verb and noun can only paint  
The face of deed and thought;  
A mask which (stiffened with restraint)  
By us is falsely wrought.

And so we ponder on a name  
While meaning's left untold.  
Yes, words are spindly things to frame  
The structure of a soul.

WE PASSED THROUGH NARROW TORTURED WAYS

We passed through narrow, tortured ways  
As laughter dribbles into sighing.  
A fitting guide this paraphrase:  
"Scared of living, tired of dying."

A BIRTHDAY GREETING WRITTEN FOR MRS. OAKLEY  
TO HER BROTHER, RALPH SPEARS

This milestone day must be observed  
By two ties I can see:  
Then one is blood; the other served  
To you for her by me.

YOU CALLED MY EASY LOVER'S TEARS

You called my easy lover's tears  
A silly cripple's crutch;  
But here I stand, sound-limbed, my dear;  
I did not weep too much.

SPREAD YOUR SONG WITH LIGHT AND LAUGHTER

Spread your song with light and laughter.  
Drink and live today.  
Love will come not so hereafter,  
Nor did it yesterday.  
Run and reel from dawn to dawning.  
Laugh away your sorrow.  
And if you catch your luck a-fawning,  
You'll not see tomorrow.

THE KINDEST WORDS I SAY OF YOU

The kindest words I say of you  
Are said not for your ear.  
Cajole, cavil the midnight through—  
I shall not say them here.  
A man concedes, if he be driven,  
Ultimates in cost;  
But that which is not freely given  
Is forever lost.

IN YOU WHO SEIZE THE DAY

In you who seize the day, this flaw  
I mark indignantly:  
The days you fondled in your paw  
Were left unseized by me.

I'VE NO COMPASSION FOR A MAN

I've no compassion for a man  
Who, loudly and in vain,  
Will shriek and curse and moan to scan  
The rhythm of his pain.  
Not so with voiceless things. When crushed  
And mute in agony—  
When silent fists through throats are pushed.  
I do not hear . . . I see.

DECLARATION OF DEFIANCE

I have a word to tell the world;  
I look for no reply.  
My message here, it shall be clear  
And not be gotten by.  
The world shall know before I go . . .  
In voices vast or faint  
It shall record that I was heard,  
Although not as a saint,  
Nor as a devil, wholly evil.  
All that I might be  
No one can say—yet to this day  
I am the most of me.

WHEN WASTING WORLDS TOO LONG HAVE TEEMED

When wasting worlds too long have teemed  
With universal ills,  
The wrath of God shall split its seams  
And smolder where it spills.

Mistaken multitudes embrace

That which the few have spurned;  
And this is how, O erring race,  
Annihilation's earned.

So shun the sluggish brotherhood;

Suck dry this prudent pill:  
What's loved by all's not always good,  
Nor that disfavored, ill.

THERE IS NO PLEASING EVERYONE

There is no pleasing everyone  
And I am weary, trying.  
Simple words they promptly shun,  
Urbanely bored, and sighing.

If doggedly I weigh the paltry

And, like them, scorn the factual,  
They wax accusatory, call me  
Pseudo-intellectual.

But you of perfect knowledge have

One fact yet to accrue  
Which serves me well as healing-salve:  
I do not write for you.

TO DIANE

In quatrains, be they new or quaint,  
I echo my profound complaint:  
That I can rhyme no billet-doux  
And coin the quintessential you.

TO SUSAN

As other poets have before  
Set down a pretty piece of lore,  
I mold a modest quatrain to  
Honor and truth and song and you.  
  
Such things as honor, song and truth,  
Are walking now, with you, in youth;  
And time will not be over-long  
When you become truth, honor and song.

THREE TRIOLETS

I

Death is the least  
Of Life's dark spears.  
West says to East:  
"Death is the least,  
Innocuous beast!"  
Beside my fears  
Death is the least  
Of Life's dark spears.

II

The sonnet needs art,  
The triolet, wit.  
So, with a poor start,  
"The sonnet needs art,"  
The thought falls apart,  
The pen fails to fit.  
The sonnet needs art,  
The triolet, wit.

III

A poem may be  
All things to man:  
Confined or free  
A poem may be.  
So, mindful of me,  
Please smother your grin.  
A poem may be  
All things to men.

## INCESSANT RAIN

Incessant the Rain:  
Susurrus and stain,  
Penultimate of pain.

The knotty knee  
On the bleeding tree  
Aches in me.

I can portray  
Tomorrow, today,  
Portraits in pain—  
Yet not explain  
Incessant Rain.

## TOKEN

Sun-drenched, so:  
Wet, sliding snow  
Fell from the bough  
Just so . . . Now  
Bent and bare  
The bough,—yet there:  
Barely seen,  
One bit of green.

Not bended now;  
Erect the bough.

Fading not slow,  
Winter and snow . . .  
Sun-drenched, so.

## THE NOBLE RIVAL

All the things I could not be . . .  
Become, for her, in place of me.  
Show her the things I could not see.

All the things I never said . . .  
Intone them gently at her bed,  
And prove how poorly I would wed.

And all the things I could not hear . . .  
Hear now, with her, each nuance clear;  
Think of me as beyond my bier.

But should you not endure this credo;  
Die before the final veto?  
"Fairest game of all's a widow!"

## THE BIRD

A sweetly-singing, small, absurd,  
And rather pretty little bird  
Sang a song I wish I'd heard.

(He came, you see, when little mattered  
Save the fact that I'd been shattered.)

Solitude and sorrow, now,  
Have given me the why and how  
Too late—the bird has flown the bough.

I learned, at least, that something more  
May now be added to my lore:  
Whom and what to listen for.

CANDOR

Some people, when they disagree,  
Will neutralize acidity  
By lapsing into pleasantry.

In many cases, this is well . . .  
But certain issues I could spell  
Banalities cannot dispell.

In making verses, 'tis the same:  
One either feigns a foolish game  
Or gives his thought an honest name.

Both methods hold appeal for me . . .  
I catch the eye first, wittily,  
Then hope the dull of sight will see.

MONODY IN MAJOR MODE

Having lost you, I agree  
(I say this unreservedly)  
That otherwise could never be.

I should suppose, this being true,  
The decent thing for me to do  
Is wish no ill to come to you . . .

But, being human, I cannot keep  
From hoping you will someday sleep  
And wake—as I do—wake to weep.

SO MANY, BRIGHT BARBARIC RACES

So many bright, barbaric races  
Struck their roots in fertile places  
East from Rome to West Cathay.  
And what remains of them today?  
A lonely obelisk worn dim,  
An echo to a pagan hymn  
Obscured by susurrus of sand;  
And, molded by forgotten hands,  
Some splendid stones (which still  
Are pallid business to fulfill  
Their glory); symbols growing thin  
With age, an image caught in tin.

Consider, then, our present races:  
Thoughtless of all future faces,  
With impunity they plan  
Expungement of the race of man;  
Not thinking that a wiser breed  
Might, in some eon hence, succeed  
In spawning from a fresh-cooled earth,  
Emerging from a narrow firth  
To blink and wonder past his dawn  
And puzzle vainly—futile pawn!

'Tis better so, to spell our doom  
And leave no unclean inch of room,  
No sage to speculate and nod  
On things locked in the mind of God.  
So fashion not a monument  
To stir a future discontent;  
Each race, in its own history,  
Will die of fallibility.

THIS CUP I SUFFERED

This cup I suffered to preserve  
Is what we richly do deserve;  
So drink with me at once, my dear,  
What I now hold but haply here.  
There is within, diluted well  
With love, but little pain . . . Now smell  
The scent that sweetens this good grail:  
This is the wine called Venture. Hale  
Be they that bear this cup away  
And drink of it from day to day;  
And pallid they, who heretofore,  
Have drunk too deep from Caution's store.  
  
Though seldom sought, 'tis often spurned;  
So drink! This, surely, we have earned.  
And with it we will eat the bread  
Of what was here so wisely said.

DAIRY IN DIALECTIC

When I am old, will I revere  
The things that I have written here?  
Will that which I have said today  
Be worth the time it took to say?  
I do not think that I shall smile  
And say, "'Tis worthless; juvenile!"  
Cool but canny, I shall look  
Upon this callow little book  
Without contempt upon my tongue,  
For I shall know that I was young  
And truly felt I would revere  
Forever, what I've written here.

\* \* \* \*

My strands of thought are threads of light  
And, like taut hemp, are woven tight.  
How shall I separate this ravel  
If they merge before the travel?  
Someday, though, an Inner Spy  
Will catch them loosed with his quick eye;  
So thread by thread, and strand by strand,  
He'll string them through his loom-like hand—  
Then, as they spread straight-out and clean,  
I shall discover what they mean.

\* \* \* \*

Of many, mostly I do hate  
The men who **will** equivocate  
And see, with self-deceived sight,  
Not That Which Is, but That Which Might.  
**Not** wanting nicer things to be  
Is also wicked, certainly;

But those who pad the skinny lore  
Of Fact, until fact is no more  
Have yet to learn what I now know  
From little learning to be so:  
Distortion does a brew distill  
Of which one quickly gets his fill;  
But he who quaffs the Bitter Truth  
May drink in age, as well as youth.

\* \* \* \*

Why should I fear devouring Death  
Who have not felt his fetid breath?  
He feeds his fill by light of moon  
And far away, and not too soon  
Shall come to claim me; not before  
I willingly shall draw the door  
And hark to hear his goat-like step.  
He comes, but he is not adept,  
For those who needs must live, as I,  
Will live till they are made to die.  
I think it is not death I fear  
But that which, ever present here,  
Feeds not on bodies, but on minds.  
One savors life and then one finds  
That unsuspectingly he dies  
Who troubles not to heed the wise.  
For those who follow fools and thoughts  
That bristle with stale "thou-shalt-nots"  
Will never even pause to ponder;  
Knowing not that "thou-may-wonder"  
Also is a valid rule.  
He who calls the sage a fool

Will live his lively little day  
To find his mind in grave decay.

\* \* \* \*

I read, with great degrees of bile,  
The writings which endorse the vile.  
All those who love the sane and decent  
Have no place, it seems, in recent  
Publications or collections—  
Bulging with the recollections  
Of those who, always under thirty,  
Dwell upon the mad and dirty.

\* \* \* \*

It matters not what I may say  
In idle hours of the day  
When, pressed by boredom, I disdain  
The things I love. There is no pain  
Or mirth in this, my treachery . . . .  
An idle cynic, easily  
Finds time to practice being brittle;  
So I labelled less than spittle  
All that I consider beauty,  
Knowing my perversest duty  
Lay in skirting 'round the truth—  
My motive more than merely youth:  
If hearts have harbored over-long  
A music not distilled in song,  
The throat would break from such an air . . . .  
So wisely will I leave it there.

\* \* \* \*



The most of that which is in me  
I cannot know; nor can I see  
How others, smugly reprimanding,  
Dare to be quite so demanding.  
What they see is but a ghost  
Of me, yet they demand my most.  
I shall not throw away my soul  
And make another's whim my goal,  
Nor shall I gnaw my nails, nor blink  
The tears of doubt away; I think  
That this is very likely so:  
Should all of me, from top to toe,  
Become revealed for them to see  
They would not like the Very Me,  
And this is true of any man  
Who gives, unwisely, all he can.  
And yet, I wonder every day  
If I have given all I may.

\* \* \* \*

I scrutinized a glass one day  
And saw reflected something fey  
And alien—it was not me!  
In truth, I lost identity.  
It startled me . . . my troubled eyes  
Stared coolly back, without surprise.  
So, hastily, I drew a tub  
And gave my flesh an angry scrub.  
I wonder still what Glass could say  
If I should speak to it someday?  
But if I spoke, might it not be  
That I'd become the Other Me?

\* \* \* \*

The hardest ill of all to cure  
(And one which I could not endure)  
Is this: that I should someday turn  
To thinking that I need not learn.  
This illness, always borne of pride,  
Is one that I cannot abide.  
Nor do I like servility;  
One needs no false humility  
To learn from many kinds of men.  
I illustrate by saying, sin  
Can yield some good, if one is wise:  
I do not mean to temporize,  
But without evil for compare  
The good would simply not be there.  
The ignorant, the sloth, the dull—  
In each, a lesson we could cull:  
By their mental mortality  
We learn the worth of industry,  
And when we do what they have not,  
We have, by negatives, been taught.  
Though learning thus is not the best,  
So few are they who are so blest  
And learn of Right through seeing it,  
That most must learn by opposite.

\* \* \* \*

Of all the things of air and earth,  
From small in size to great of girth,  
The things that give the most delight  
To me are those I see in flight.  
What wondrous things a bird can do!  
If only man could do them too . . .

If man could climb, and glide, and soar,  
 And thus be free forever more!  
 If you have ever felt, not heard,  
 The heartbeat of a dying bird,  
 You know that final, frantic, flutter—  
 Not unlike a camera-shutter—  
 Pulsing almost eagerly,  
 It seems, into Eternity.  
 I felt this once when I was young . . .  
 Since children have no tutored tongue  
 I now shall take the time to say  
 Exactly what I felt that day:  
 The bird, it pleased me to surmise,  
 Had died of eating ethered skies.  
 I coveted the bird his death,  
 And knew, if I chose **my** last breath,  
 I'd want the winged way to die,  
 By slipping swiftly from the sky.  
 Exhausted death, and—most profound—  
 A death of silence, not of sound.

\* \* \* \*

I climbed a craggy hill one day  
 And stumbled on the stony way  
 And thought the path would never stop,  
 But sure enough, I reached the top.  
 I stood upon the crest at last  
 And looked below at what I'd passed,  
 Then said, with some simplicity,  
 "This view is good; it pleases me.  
 The breeze has brewed a pleasant smell . . ."  
 There is no word I now could tell  
 To give to you a faint reflection . . .  
 Onceness, and Inert Perfection.

#### THE FABLE OF PIERRE, THE PAINTER

So drained am I of heavy verse,  
 I shall attempt now something worse  
 And spin for you a funny fable.  
 Once, beneath a leaky gable,  
 (In a room they call a garret)  
 Lived Pierre, largely on credit.  
 Though Pierre was very poor,  
 He thought that money was a bore  
 Since honest painters, under stress,  
 Could live on next-to-nothingness.  
 He truly loved his poverty  
 And also loved depravity.  
 "Beauty exists where one may find it:  
 Try in vain," said he, "to bind it!"  
 This was his sole moral duty:  
 Seeking, not creating, beauty—  
 Beauty found in ten-cent beers  
 And other vices learned from peers.  
 And this his only concrete credo:  
 Laughter at the Cafe Lido.  
 Our Pierre was seldom morbid,  
 Nor was he **completely** sordid;  
 He had certain virtues, too  
 (Though they may not seem such to you):  
 He had a strange integrity,  
 A zest, a juvenality,  
 And (this apparent at a glance,  
 And most engaging) tolerance.  
 Pierre accepted fully all:  
 The rich, the poor, the short, the tall—  
 He sought the Man within the fellow,  
 Be he black or white or yellow.  
 Though his love of man was sure,  
 The men that he could not endure  
 Were those who sought to save his soul

PIERRE (Continued)

And saw in this a noble goal.  
Since this alone could make him rude:  
A morally aggressive prude—  
He was at first merely appalled  
The day the local preacher called.  
They chatted briefly, lightly, sanely—  
Laughed a little too inanely—  
Till Pierre felt something snap  
And sensed an old, familiar trap.  
The preacher left, but called again  
And spoke to poor Pierre of sin,  
Until Pierre, who hates the sinister,  
Had to plot against the minister.  
So he filched, by night, a sack  
Of apples from a peddler's back,  
Then stole an extra hypodermic  
(From his friend, the diabetic)  
Pricked each apple at the core  
And pressed the plunger one notch more  
With each insertion, till the meat  
Was soaked with something none too sweet.  
Reflecting briefly on his soul,  
He placed them in a pretty bowl  
And left it at the parsonage.  
Then, after what seemed like an age,  
He spied an item in the news  
(Which he did daily now peruse)  
Which seemed to speak to him alone:  
"The rector died. The cause unknown."  
  
Now fables, whether penned or oral,  
All must have a witty moral.  
Mine is this (and should you find  
No wit in it, you must be blind):  
A daily apple, this rhyme teaches,  
Threatens him who heals or preaches.

PIERRE AND THE FAITH-HEALER

Another fable you should hear  
Concerns the picaresque Pierre.  
He was, recall you, that fine chap  
Who killed the rector with a winesap.  
Having done this deed of grue  
With none the wiser, in a few  
Short days Pierre slipped once again  
Into his life of cheerful sin.  
One day, he wondered aimlessly  
How he might garner, blamelessly,  
Some money—knowing this was crass—  
Without betrayal to his class.  
The Cafe Lido now no more  
Would welcome him within its door  
Until (O, this, the wounding jab!)  
He paid a portion of his tab.  
He drained the dregs of last night's wine  
And, seeing that the day was fine,  
He donned his thread-bare, only suit,  
And lit last night's half-smoked cheroot.  
A plan was churning in his brain  
And soon, he saw, the way was plain.  
Pierre had seen, the day before,  
A hand-bill hanging from a door  
(Beneath a drab and off-plumb steeple)  
Reading thus: "We Heal the People!"  
Doctor Alexander Murd  
Had drawn a daily, docile herd  
Who came to hear this Healer-Teacher.  
Our Pierre recalled the preacher,  
So he sought the church again,  
And noticed, en route, with chagrin,  
The coat that he had failed to mend  
Was on the verge of one huge rend.  
"Ah well," he said, "I must make do,"

PIERRE (Continued)

And reached the church at half-past two—  
The daytime service, just beginning,  
Told by volume God was winning.  
So Pierre, who was not ill,  
Saw in his plan the role of skill;  
He spoke with Murd, and then with ease  
He mimicked Parkinson's disease.  
But in the midst of frenzied healing  
Poor Pierre's coat split, revealing  
That his back was bare and sticky  
(Shirtless, Pierre wore a dickey);  
The pews were buzzing with asides:  
"Such poverty! But borne with pride!"  
Then, pity loosed their meager purse  
And, feeling that none could be worse,  
Financially, than poor Pierre,  
The joy of giving filled the air.  
Then Doctor Murd, his eyes a-gleam,  
Blessed all benignly, till it seemed  
The air itself was filled with spirit:  
"God's Word lives for all who hear it!  
Go, my flock, with God!" he cried.  
Before the final footstep died,  
Good Doctor Murd, his hands a rake,  
Gathered the coins to count the take.  
Pierre received a fee quite ample  
For his dramatized example.

So, like the other fable-story,  
This one, too, holds allegory . . . .  
Worthwhile fables teach us well  
And now I shall my lesson tell:  
The stitch that saved, within this rhyme,  
Was **not** the stitch applied in time.

SELINA HARDING

Selina Harding, a once-piquant bride,  
Watched her husband-lover ride  
Into battle, courteously,  
And thought of eighteen forty-three.  
"Forty-three was my wedding-summer,  
But this year's rose is the martial-drummer's."

Dim days followed, without number,  
Selina's nights of uneasy slumber.  
With velvet briskness, gallantly,  
She managed Harding's property.  
She prayed each night for his return  
And gave her child a verse to learn.

Tedious days, and unremembered,  
'Till that bitterest of Decembers  
When the shrieking fiend called War  
Came with the skirmish of sixty-four  
And made his camp in her tulip-bed,  
Leaving a wake of ragged dead.

Did Selina weep, I wonder,  
As the cannon's quaking thunder  
Carved their gasping history  
On her brain, indelibly?  
"Forty-three was my wedding-summer,  
But this year's rose is the martial-drummer's."

THE MAIDEN AND THE MINSTREL

Maiden: "Sing your song, but move along,  
No coin have I for you!  
No strolling boy, no tuneful toy  
Could pay my sorrow's due."

Minstrel: "But by the saint! Name your complaint,  
And I'll re-string my lute.  
My nimble hand is as a wand  
Which freshens puckered fruit."

Maiden: "It is too fey, your minor way  
Of riddles and of rue;  
My lover died at half-past-five—  
For love, I'm dying, too."

Minstrel: "If I could stay the hour away  
And sing for you my song,  
My tuneful strumming and my humming—  
They'd speed your grief along."

He lingered there and smoothed her hair,  
Then, bordering on sin;  
She dried her tears and called him dear  
And hid a guilty grin.

Since mourning is of doubtful bliss  
And since the minstrel tarried,  
She shed a tear at her lover's bier  
And one week later—married.

A BRIEF BALLAD TO THE PERIPATETIC GEORGE

Have other places, other faces  
Stirred you from the laggard?  
Do desert sands, or fertile lands  
Offer what we beggared?

Tho' some things here you may hold dear,  
And some you are regretting,  
Whereon you travel, grass or gravel,  
Try—in vain—forgetting.

THE BALLAD OF LADY ALICE

Countless times I trod this way  
And walked with rapid feet,  
For less than half a mile away  
My love and I would meet.

A homely cottage had she there—  
A welcome-wealthy place;  
And though the meadows near were fair,  
Still fairer was her face.

I stopped one day beside the spring  
(A gourd served me as chalice)  
And turned to spy a handsome thing:  
The carriage of Lady Alice.

Lady Alice—wealthy, sad,  
A widowed one-and-twenty,  
Dressed in mourning—so I bade  
(And with respect a-plenty)

That she share my gourd. She rose  
And stepped down from her carriage,  
Then belied her mourning clothes  
By speaking next of marriage.

Years have passed and I must say  
How this road leads to rue:  
My first love aged before her day  
(And grew old single, too!)

But if the truth be told this hour,  
I have naught to hide:  
I'm frankly glad I wed the dower—  
Not the cottage-bride.

### THUS NEWLY DID I VIEW THE TREES

Thus newly did I view the trees:

Solace being my sole intent  
Softly, making no sound, I went  
Into the wood where taller grew  
The trees than when they sheltered you . . .  
(Grown taller, I should say, by a most infinitesimal bit  
During your absence, and in spite of it.)

I longed once more, in certain secret spots, frangibly  
familiar, to lie down,  
Lie down with you—whence gold the green grass has grown—  
With you as once you were and are no more; but, being  
alone  
And being borne only with knowing it cannot be—thence I

Did cast an idle gaze about, and, glancing so, did sigh  
And watched, with utter disinterest, as ten—or was it  
ten times ten again,—who knows? terrific titans  
touched the orange Autumn sky.

This is surely the most painful plight:  
Losing vision, yet retaining sight.

### DIMLY IN THE DEEPENING DUSK

Dimly in the deepening dusk I saw—  
And saw but faintly, shudderingly, and with awe—  
In formal flight, a flock of wild geese winging overhead.  
It was to ease my envy that I said:  
“Impertinent birds! that live in greedy gabble on  
the ground,  
Yet soar with such a wild and silent grace . . . and whither  
bound  
Are they? They do not know.  
Oh, I could not be happy, so!”

Saying this, I turned to see  
My illest-tempered neighbor, nearing me—  
Favoring limpingly,  
A knotty, gnarled and raw-nerved knee—  
So, thinking I had sniffed the scent  
Of one well-roiled for argument;  
Picture, if you please, my quaint surprise  
When he blinked once or twice his aged, hooded, yellowed eyes,  
And said but this: “The birds were beautiful, just now.”  
Then I knew, although I knew not how,  
That men may also soar, though it be but a while—  
And thus is one libation loosed, and one not laced with  
bile.

### THE DOG IN THE RAIN

“Hound, that hunted by my side  
With such alert intelligence, and so discerning-eyed,  
Have you now not wit enough, poor silly thing, to flee  
This rain that falls relentlessly?

See:

Even now it wets your wild coat past recognition,  
You shall suffer for this . . .  
This silliness  
Tomorrow, and with hoarse yelp, and wheezing  
Bark, and sharp sneezing.”

Not heeding me, he pranced and pawed  
With senseless joy about the rain-drenched lawn.  
And I recalled . . .

How I, when young, had likewise dashed from tree to wet  
and warty tree,

Letting the cool sweet rain, with impunity,  
Fall down on me.

I longed to join the dog, I knew his need—

But I could not: for I was clad, alas! in costly, cautious,  
very-adult tweed.

### THE TULIP

I think the most gallant of blossoms  
Must surely be the TULIP.  
On its pliant, sturdy, tendon-stem,  
It bends and bows but remains unfractured  
In the fiercest wind.  
Unlike the lovely rose, whose petals  
Shatter beneath the gentlest shower;  
Nor is it fragrant  
As the talcumed, cradled, prissily-gowned orchid.  
The tulip is your flower:  
Bright, not delicate—  
But strong.

### THE REALIZATION

Drenched with dreams, immersed in song, and laved with  
love:

So would I live, although I learn but little of  
These things, that here  
Are more than dear.

It is that here we see such dreamless, tuneless, and un-  
lovely things:

The putrid beef that brings,

Invariably, maggots: also, certain lethal little bugs  
that burrow in the cheese;

And breads that spread stale stinks with green and ghost-  
ly molded spots . . .

These thoughts,

And certain thorny thoughts akin to these

(Both in and out of season)

Make me afraid, and I know not the reason.

### SUMMER SUN

The beast-sun of Summer penetrates the bent backs  
Of workers in gardens—

It worries the flesh like a blunt tooth.

Relentless sun, scorching the green

Till all is burnt orange . . .

Intemperate?

Yes;

Yet what are Spring and Autumn

But noisy eleven and tedious one—

Give me always noon

With its strokes counted in hot sweet silence.

### WOOD

A richly-grained wood is to me

Like marble, only softer,

Like caramel, yet firmer.

Vulnerable beneath dirty, sweat-staining hands,

But eager for the cool, clean caress of dry fingertips.

It seems, almost, a living thing;

It may give or want or merely be

All in dignified repose.

Graceful Servitor, I give you . . .

Reverence.

### NEVER MAY LOVE BE BORNE AWAY

Never may love be borne away

From the laden limbs which bear it.

He that would feed must feed at the tree.

In the repleting dew of harvest,

The moist astringent pulp is sweet.

But he that would hoard love

—Be it dank cellars or dark cupboards—

Will know a lean winter:

The narrow, yellow teeth of deception

And the soft rot of hate

Invade and eat.

THE UNKNOWN SHE (WHITE WITCH)

All that's wonderful and wild  
She has borrowed or beguiled;  
Her eyes were once a docile doe's—  
She learned her mouth upon a rose—

Her hair was spun from shafts of light—  
At very least, it dims the sight.  
She speaks in voices never heard  
Before; weaving word upon word . . .

Bewitching, she, in every way—  
Yet where she dwells, I cannot say.

ANGUISH

Cherished yet, one cheerless thought—  
    Will it never wane?  
"Once you were mine—now you are not."  
These words, that were so hardly taught,  
Shall never be fully forgot:  
    They bump about my brain.

Watching withered leaves, I sit,  
    Counting those that fall.  
My heart is like a hollow pit;  
Still, I must use what little wit  
I have to count them, knowing it  
    Matters not at all.

IF I COULD PATCH OR PAINT

If I could patch or paint, or both,  
The dusty wing of a crippled moth;  
Or spread again with scent of dew  
The dessicate bloom offending you:  
Or sweeten the sadness of Autumn birds—  
But these are things not done with words.  
A beauty, once-broken, is best left untended;  
But some things by man are not left unended:  
With silent dispatch, with hands deft and terse,  
He fixes the clasp of his bulging purse.

SO LIKE A WALNUT-MEAT

So like a walnut-meat, picked primly  
With a silver needle, nimbly  
Did you pluck the heart from me.  
How much more mercy would there be  
In heavy, brutal, bludgeon-blows  
That smash against your chimney-stones  
—Dumb to pity, deaf to moans—  
Both shell and contents there diffusing.  
Far more mercy, Heaven knows,  
Although, in your eyes, less amusing.

WE DO NOT PARSE A LOVER'S PHRASE

We do not parse a lover's phrase, nor read  
The beauty of a rose  
By stripping stem from leaf,  
And surely no one feels a need  
To count the tears of grief.  
I pray that no one knows  
The dimensions of a pleasure—  
Some things have no measure,  
But if they could be read  
They never should be said.



AFTER HEARING MARIAN ANDERSON

This voice now singing, freed from a throat of brown;  
This over-powering majesty, like ice-  
Crowned mountains, like a vital flame unbound,  
Unquenched—This voice reflects all sacrifice  
And all the exultation found in song.

Applaud we must, but should not linger,  
For, after having heard the singer,  
Only silence could belong.

IF I BEAR NOT THE FRUIT OF LOVE

If I bear not the fruit of love for you  
And point my brittle branches to the sky,  
(Though heavy-drenched the orchards fill your view)  
The blame is not your tilling, no, 'tis I:  
For, having thrust a thirsty root in flint  
In search of water, now my bud is spent.

THERE IS A TIME FOR DYING

There is a time for dying, one and all—  
A season aptly named, for slow death falls  
From off the limbs and crackles underfoot.  
A pallid yellow sickly shines, and mute  
And tortured trees begin to rattle. Yes,  
There is a time for dying, time for rest.

FRAGMENTS:

I

Music, when brittle staffs are broken,  
Hoists me up this Hill.  
This, no matter how I've spoken,  
Supports me; always will  
And always has. If ever I  
Spoke light of it, I lied:  
And thus deserve, not just to die—  
(But) live in silent pride

FRAGMENTS (Continued)

II

Sweetly though you sing today,  
There is no tune to soothe away  
The thorny thing I now shall say.

III

Once, inattentively, I took a text  
(Its name not now remembered) to dispell  
My memory of you. Startled and vexed,  
I stumbled on a verse that once was well  
Beloved by you and me. "Though this be quaint,  
Unwieldy, I know now (?) is," I said,  
"And trite of imagery," thus my complaint:  
"Surely on this poor fare I never fed.

IV

While thumbing, half-attentive, through a text  
(The name eludes me), seeking to dispell  
My memory of you; suddenly vexed,  
I spied an ancient verse that had been well  
Beloved by both of us. "Albeit quaint,  
Such phrases are no more in vogue," I said,  
"And such dull imagery!" Thus my complaint:  
"Would I had not on this poor fare been fed."  
Yet I, on reading it, some charm regained  
Not through its worth; but through my sentiment:  
Hence, many worthless verses yet un-named  
I shall so cherish; keep with this intent:  
These verses,

V

A certain song not yet upon my tongue—  
A song of sadness, done in minor modes,  
Perhaps—I shall not leave too long unsung:  
Both grief and gladness shall I take as goads.

<sup>painful</sup>  
A ~~time of~~ silence made its way,  
Slowly, cruelly,  
To point with every passing day  
My friend, estranged from me.

The words we tossed in acid jest  
I gladly would erase!



~~I, never having been as prone to praise~~

~~I, having ~~not~~ seen the news with nervous~~

~~I, having ~~so perceived~~, ~~and~~ nervous-~~  
- ~~lately~~ lately seen ~~but~~ but

~~eyed,~~ eyed,  
And having felt the clammy claw of  
dread,

And, ~~having seen how others~~  
knowing not how I may put  
aside

My fear of being

Richard Oakley's rough copy of fragments VII and IX.

FRAGMENTS (Continued)

VI

So foolish they that yet hold this belief:  
That sleep may somehow mend a man his ache,  
Or weave a cloth with which to cover grief . . .  
Sleep gives no solice; so I lie awake;  
Knowing that she, for whom tonight I sorrow  
Shall be no less

VII

A painful silence made its way,  
Slowly, cruelly,  
To point with every passing day  
My friend, estranged from me.  
The words we tossed in acid jest  
I gladly would erase!

VIII

A time of silence ticked its way  
So slowly, cruelly,  
Marking with every passing day  
My friend, estranged from me.  
The words I tossed in bitter jest  
I gladly would with-draw!  
Oh, well—perhaps this is the best:

IX

I, having lately seen, but nervous-eyed,  
And having felt the clammy claw of dread,  
And knowing not how I may put aside  
My fear of being . . .

X

Grieve not for me, beloved kin,  
Should Death's Wry irony offend:  
This jest, corporeal today,  
Can be enjoyed another way.

## THE FABLE OF THE INTENSE INTELLECTUAL

Robert was, above all things, a man of unshakeable convictions, a man who unswervingly abided by his decisions; and he had decided while he was still quite young that his primary function in this life was to observe. He therefore devoted all the zeal of his youth to watching, shrewdly and piercingly, the actions of those about him. Perhaps, for him, the most uncomfortable aspect of his watchfulness was that he did it so gravely. Robert was, alas, a humorless soul, and it is indeed fortunate that he was also by nature dispassionate; a less convenient assemblage of traits might have resulted in, at the very least, a severely melancholy disposition.

Robert traveled in solitude to many places and watched and listened. He hitch-hiked, he rode the rails, he even managed to own (for a brief but pleasant period) an ancient and surprisingly efficient roadster. Job followed job as city followed town and hamlet. He spent many evenings (which the pleasure-mad would no doubt describe as desolate) meandering endlessly down strange streets in search of a revelation, an insight, a . . . what? He did not know, actually, what he sought; he knew only that someday, through his cumulative fund of learning and experience, he would be able to discern a reason, a pattern, a meaning.

During one sojourn, he descended, in an appropriately seedy costume, to the subterranean haunts of the Youthful Protestors where he heard a dedicated pianist, his sensitive eyes protected by sunglasses from the harsh glare of candles, reorganize the rhythms of a Bach Invention to the form of a Latin-American folk dance. After matinee performances, he stood in the lobbies of movie-houses and watched the bobbing, colorfully flowered hats which were almost animated by the intensity of their wearers as they discussed the moist and manifold beauty of the Art they had so recently witnessed. He wandered through countless public libraries procuring books and more books and seeing always the homeless, faceless old men, consumed by apathy and despair, nodding over newspapers. Sitting in churches, he was overwhelmed by the smug power of the godly who, unable to concern themselves with such trivia, dozed as the minister spoke of man's creation and the ultimate resting place of his soul.

Robert was, on occasion, able to accumulate enough money to buy his way into the frosty dens of pleasure frequented by the well-to-do. There he heard brittle laughter, its volume equated exactly with the bank-balance of the raconteur, and he perceived that a lady of breeding could, after her sixth manhattan, still manage to tilt her soup-spoon in the proper direction. He also attended Important Lectures and was gratified to learn that the world could be saved by reading the poetry of Marianne Moore, by attaching still larger gymnasia to the public schools of Nebraska, or by erecting a statue in honor of a prominent bootlegger-turned-philanthropist.

Robert watched and listened to all these things and matured as the years passed. So it came about that one hot summer afternoon, as he lay on a hard, lonely bed in a boarding-house room, a room which was the brother of a hundred rooms he had known before, Robert knew somehow that the end of his quest was near. Rising up, he stubbed his cigarette soberly and said to himself: "I have seen life and evaluated it as the tawdry carnival it is. I have known the sordidness of youth, the futility of age, the sham of the intellectual, the dreariness of the dull-witted, the hypocrisy of the pious, the vulgarity of the irreverent. Surely I have seen as much as any man of my years, and it's imperative that I now assimilate my experience into a meaningful statement. But how may I best give expression to my knowledge? How shall I speak of what I have learned?"

As the waning sun slipped lower and lower in the sky Robert pondered this question. Finally, he reached his decision as dusk settled over his dusty room. Resolutely, he dressed, boarded a down-town bus and, a half-hour later, took an elevator to the thirty-second floor of an office building and jumped.

MORAL: Laugh before you leap.

Mrs. Gordon stepped from the suburban beauty parlor and patted the halo of curls closer to her head. She was almost happy. The sun made a mirror of the Fashion Shoppe window and she peered at the reflection she found there. Gilda really did a superlative job this time, she thought: rich, deep chestnut with just a hint of pewter glinting here and there. She was terribly grateful to modern science for helping her avoid that drab, salt-and-pepper hue one so often saw on women her age.

She continued up the walk which bordered the ell of the shopping center, glancing absently into shop windows as she walked and thinking dismally of her age. She had an hour to kill before her bridge game and she had hoped to spend it without the intrusion of any unpleasant thoughts, but she had been unable, all morning, to shake the feeling that she had lost ten years somewhere. Forty-eight this October and only yesterday she had been thirty and young. Where had the years gone? Were they simply a dreary, relentless procession of days like this one: rising at ten, lunch and shopping until mid-afternoon, then calling on equally bored friends? She had an uneasy feeling that if she died this week it would matter very little to anyone—least of all to herself. She doubted if anyone would notice her absence for several days—the children were grown and away from home; Horace spent as few waking hours as possible in their house. When he was not seeing his patients, he contrived to be busy at the hospital, so it was not unusual for her to take both lunch and dinner alone.

She sometimes wondered why she bothered to go home at all. Harriet managed the kitchen much better than she ever could and the cleaning woman freed her from the onerous chore of keeping house. It seemed that others had insinuated themselves into the position of controlling what should, by rights, be her domain. Was there a conspiracy afoot against women like her, a conspiracy which rendered them so useless that they would eventually wither in a hell of inactivity?

She brushed these thoughts away resolutely, knowing that in this direction lay, if not madness, at least neurosis. She had read enough magazine articles to recognize the signs. It wasn't that she found her life distasteful; it was just that she had nothing to do, no purpose, no—What was that silly word she heard some teen-agers using?—"kicks," that was it. Ellen, she told herself firmly, what you need is a "kick."

But what should it be? There was a problem. An affair? Too messy, too difficult to handle. Alcohol? She swiftly turned over in her mind the middle-

aged drunks she had seen cavorting about the country club and dismissed this idea immediately. She didn't need money, so that eliminated stealing.

She paused beneath a quaint, cleverly aged wooden shield which swayed in the breeze as it bore its discreet legend: "Colony House—Fine Food." She marched inside and quickly found a half-concealed corner table. Ordinarily, she gave little notice to the decor of the Colony House, but today she glanced with a faint displeasure. Everything in the room was so appallingly quaint. The place fairly writhed with ill-matched natural woods, and prim little Hitchcock chairs thrust themselves up from the floor every few feet, uncompromisingly, like starched black snakes. I don't believe, she decided abruptly, that I'll patronize the Colony House any more.

In her perusal she noticed idly that each table was equipped with a genuine pine salt cellar and pepper mill. These would match nicely with my curtains, she thought. I must remember to pick up a pair before . . . Her thoughts trailed off, tripped over a word, and then took up an entirely different thread. How strange, she thought slowly, that I should use a word almost daily without once noticing that it has more than one meaning. "Pick up," for example, doesn't always mean "purchase." She smiled gleefully. Why not literally "pick up" a pair of table ornaments—this pair? It might be fun to steal some worthless trinket; it's something I've certainly never done before. She glanced around casually and saw that there were only three customers in the room; matrons like herself, each concentrating intently on one of the many low-calorie specials benevolently offered by the Colony House. Two waitresses were taking advantage of the hostess' absence by sneaking gulps of stolen tea in one corner. After making quite sure that no one was watching, Mrs. Gordon quietly opened her purse, slid the wooden articles off the table into it and surreptitiously drew out a handkerchief. Her head bowed, she coughed delicately several times and looked up nervously. Slowly, slowly, her eyes swept the room. No one had seen her. That's one advantage of being such an anonymous person, she thought grimly; they wouldn't notice me if I had an epileptic fit right here. Completely relieved, she lingered over her coffee fifteen minutes and left, smiling pleasantly at the hostess as she walked out.

Mrs. Gordon hummed merrily to herself as she opened her front door that evening and placed her bundles on the hall table. Today had been exhilarating, more fun than she had had in years. It had taken all her self-control to keep from telling the girls at the bridge game about her new-found amusement. Tomorrow, she would try her hand at lifting from the other stores in the shopping center. Ah, tomorrow! She could hardly wait.

The next day, Mrs. Gordon went to the drugstore, bought three magazines and a jar of cold cream and made off successfully with a pair of ear-

rings. Tawdry baubles that they were, at the moment she prized them more than her engagement ring. She then went to the hardware store, where she bought a set of aluminum pans and managed to snatch, again successfully, a chisel and a screwdriver.

Throughout the remainder of the week, Mrs. Gordon found it necessary to make six trips to various shopping centers on the west side of town. Practice makes perfect, she thought frivolously, and by Saturday she felt she had acquired enough skill to tackle the downtown area.

Harmon-Mitchell was the largest, oldest and finest department store in the state. Mrs. Gordon had patronized it often in the past; it was the only place within a radius of two hundred miles where you could get really stylish models of Dr. Funk's orthopedic shoes. She tried on a pair and was trying to decide how to go about stealing the shoe-horn when something caught her eye. At the counter to her left was an attractive display of pens and pencils. Occupying the most prominent position were two elegant ladies' pens. Each was made of gold; each had a small diamond set into the clip-holder. One had a minute string of emeralds around the cap; the other had a similar setting of rubies. The price of each was clearly marked: sixty-five dollars. Here, she thought, is the acid test. If I can walk out of the store with one of those pens . . . It was delightful even to savor an anticipated victory; she could vividly imagine her triumph after so successful a **coup**.

After thanking the shoe-clerk, she gathered up her purse and her packages and wandered slowly to the stationery counter. She fingered several articles and slowly made her way along the counter until the pens were a few inches from her hands. She looked around carefully. The nearest clerk was several yards away with her back to Mrs. Gordon. There were a few men and women hurrying by with tense expressions on their faces. She watched for several minutes and saw that no one had looked her way for a long time.

She put her purse on the counter, drew a slip of paper from it and scribbled something on it with one of the cheap pens from the rack. As she replaced the cheap pen, she let her hand brush across the case which held the gold pens. The one set with emeralds slipped out of its display box quite easily; she dropped it in her purse alongside the scrap of paper and strolled over to the greeting-card rack.

As she thumbed through the cards, a well-dressed young man moved around the counter and stood beside her. She paid no attention him. When she turned to leave, he touched her elbow.

"Would you step to the office with me, please?" He smiled pleasantly. **Dear God**, she thought wildly. **I've been caught!** She could taste salt on

her lips and her brow felt unpleasantly damp and chilly. The purse slipped from her hands, and she watched with fascinated horror as the wretched pen rolled out and stopped an inch away from her foot. It seemed to grow larger and closer and she realized dimly that she could not hear anything, not even the excited crowd which gathered soon after she lost consciousness . . .

Mrs. Gordon closed the door to the manager's office behind her. She felt sure that it would be easier to walk on water than to traverse the short distance to the nearest exit sign. Nevertheless, with head high and cheeks flaming, she walked somewhat unsteadily to the parking lot, completely convinced that every eye was riveted on her back.

Driving home took almost more energy than she possessed, and as she pulled jerkily into her drive she noticed that her right leg was twitching visibly. Reaction from strain, no doubt. She was unreasonably irritated by the sight of her husband's car in the garage. The very day I need to be alone, need time to think, Horace takes the afternoon off. She shut off the motor and sat quietly, trying to arrange her thoughts.

Ghostly was the only word for the scene she had endured in the manager's office. Mr. Mitchell himself, whom Mrs. Gordon saw occasionally at the country club, came bustling in, bland and dapper. You understand, Mrs. Gordon, that even though we need not report this to the authorities, you must withdraw your account. As he talked, he assumed the nightmarish proportions of an ogre, and, as in a nightmare, Mrs. Gordon found herself paralyzed, voiceless, unable to retaliate. She thanked him meekly and stole out of the office, utterly cowed and exhausted.

Well, as hideous as that ordeal had been, an even nastier one was facing her. How could she tell Horace? Of course she would have to tell him; it was a joint account and he would find out eventually. She infinitely preferred that he hear the story from her own lips instead of piecing it together from bits of gossip. What would he do? What would he say?

Mrs. Gordon drew a mirror from her purse and tried to repair the ravages of tears, fright and over-wrought nerves. Her hands paused in mid-stroke as she realized that, for the first time in years, she and Horace were actually going to **talk**. Not only that, they were going to talk about **her**, about her future, or rather, about their future. Of course, this was a hellish set of circumstances for a conversation, but in a strange, spine-chilling way, it was rather exciting.

She stepped out of the car briskly, almost gaily, and took some pains to rearrange her face before opening the front door. It would hardly do, she thought, to burst in grinning like a school-girl when I tell Horace he's married to a criminal.

## BIOGRAPHY

Cecil Richard Oakley was born in Bowling Green, Kentucky, on August 2, 1939. He attended public schools in Bowling Green and Nashville. Before coming to Western in the fall of 1960, Richard attended David Lipscomb College and Peabody College, where he studied music. At Peabody, he played the piano and did arrangements for several professional and non-professional groups. At Western, he began a major in English and continued his musical interests. He was the pianist for Western's "Little Show".

Richard joined Western Writers and started writing in the fall of 1960. His first poem, "Wood", appears on page 57; and "Selina Harding", his first poem published in VOICES, is on page 51. The sonnet "When Something Fair and Precious Passes" (page 7) won Third Place in the Southern Literary Festival in Nashville, Tennessee, in the spring of 1961. Richard was elected Editor-in-Chief of Western Writers just prior to his automobile accident in October, 1961. He died on November 4.

Sylvia Salem

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