

LETTER TO
A COMRADE

JOY DAVIDMAN

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THE
YALE SERIES OF YOUNGER POETS
EDITED BY STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

LETTER TO A COMRADE

**LETTER
TO A COMRADE**

BY JOY DAVIDMAN

WITH A FOREWORD BY
STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

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1938

TO
ERNST THAELMANN
WHO WILL NOT KNOW

Foreword.

Here is what an intelligent, sensitive, and vivid mind thinks about itself and the things of the modern world. It will be obvious enough, to anyone who reads *Letter to a Comrade*, that the heroes of the Twenties are not Miss Davidman's heroes nor their demons her demons. What may not be so obvious is the fact—important to any young writer—that she has a very considerable command of technique and an individuality that can express itself successfully in a variety of forms. There are echoes here, as there are in almost any first book, and there are a few practice pieces. They occur, as they are bound to occur, because the poet learns his craft by exercising it. But there is also genuine power—and that's rather harder to come by.

Because of her power, her vividness, and her sharp expression of much that is felt and thought by many of her own generation, I hope that Miss Davidman's book will reach a rather larger audience than that generally reserved for first books of verse. For sometimes you may learn almost as much about a generation by reading its poetry as by making graphs and collecting voluminous statistics. This is a generation that knew the Depression in its 'teens, the War not at all. It is just now beginning to be articulate. And you will find plenty of indignation here, but not a willingness to accept frustration.

Miss Davidman can see, with accuracy and freshness, the thing in front of her eyes,

the desert towns, the blown trees edging the prairie
meant to break the wind, and the abandoned filling
stations

and the places where jack rabbits jump out of the night,
the wet, fine street that "shines like a salmon's back," the fertile
country,

Divided between the buckwheat and the wheat,
milky with breathing cattle. . . .

She can also comment upon the thing seen with fire and
imagination. And, in such poems as "Spartacus 1938" she can
write with an emotion none the less powerful for being
contained.

I have chosen above from her work in the freer forms. But she
can be equally sharp and telling in the older ones, as in
"Submarine," "Snow in Madrid," and the effective and moving
"Prayer against Indifference":

When wars and ruined men shall cease
To vex my body's house of peace,
And bloody children lying dead
Let me lie softly in my bed
To nurse a whole and sacred skin,
Break roof and let the bomb come in.

Knock music at the templed skull
And say the world is beautiful,
But never let the dweller lock
Its house against another knock;
Never shut out the gun, the scream,
Never lie blind within a dream.

I have quoted only two stanzas—you had better read the whole poem. It is another generation speaking—and it has another attitude than disillusion's.

If I have stressed Miss Davidman's social and contemporary poems, it is not because they are the only poems in the book. But a good many social and contemporary poems succeed in being merely social and contemporary. They have admirable intentions but no execution. But Miss Davidman is able to say things so they stick in the mind. And in "Twentieth-Century Americanism"—to mention a single poem—she has done a very interesting thing. She has given the point of view of the city-bred toward America—the America that does not come from the grass-roots but from the long blocks of apartments under the electric light. And she does it so you will remember it, though, as you will notice, she does not do it with entire approval.

There are other poems I would like to mention, but a foreword must have an end. There is richness of imagery here, a lively social consciousness, a varied command of forms and a bold power. As concerns Miss Davidman herself, she was born and educated in New York City. She is a graduate of Hunter College and has an M.A. from Columbia University. She has taught English in the New York City high schools and spent last summer at the Macdowell Colony in Peterboro. She has recently completed a novel. She is twenty-three years old.

STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

Contents.

<u>Foreword by Stephen Vincent Benét</u>	
<u>Letter to a Comrade</u>	7
<u>To the Virgins</u>	13
<u>Crocea Mors</u>	20
<u>Spartacus 1938</u>	21
<u>The Princess in the Ivory</u>	22
<u>Tower</u>	24
<u>Twentieth-Century Americanism</u>	
<u>Submarine</u>	25
<u>Prayer against Indifference</u>	29
<u>I the Philosopher</u>	31
<u>Necrophile</u>	32
<u>Snow in Madrid</u>	34
<u>Cadence on a Stolen Line</u>	40
<u>Night-Piece</u>	41
<u>Survey Mankind</u>	42
<u>The Alchemist</u>	44
<u>Il pleure dans mon coeur</u>	48
<u>Lament for Evolution</u>	50
<u>Japanese Print</u>	51
<u>This Woman</u>	53
<u>For the Revolution</u>	54
<u>Obsession</u>	55
<u>Sorceress Eclogue</u>	57
<u>Prayer against Barrenness</u>	58
<u>Fly in Amber</u>	61
<u>Prothalamion</u>	63
<u>Yet One More Spring</u>	64
<u>Near Catalonia</u>	65
<u>Four Elements</u>	67

<u>The Empress Changes Lovers</u>	68
<u>In Praise of Fascists</u>	73
<u>The Lately Dead</u>	75
<u>Little Verse</u>	76
<u>Division</u>	77
<u>Totentanz</u>	78
<u>Againrising</u>	80
<u>Jewess to Aryan</u>	81
<u>To a Fish</u>	83
<u>Waltzing Mouse</u>	85
<u>Tortoise</u>	86
<u>And Pilate Said</u>	88
<u>Apology for Liberals</u>	89
<u>End of a Revolutionary</u>	90
<u>An Absolution</u>	91
<u>Dirge for the Living</u>	92
<u>Skeleton</u>	93
	94

Letter to a Comrade.

(To Ellen Weinberg)

Leaving New York, leaving the triple rivers
netted in ships; turn again,
wanderer, turn the eyes homeward. Remember the city
settled in the eastward sky stiff with towers
crested and curved in the tight circle of home
cupped excellently in the sky. Possess understanding;

see this is your heart, turn and perceive these towers
sprung from the syllables of your mouth, this iron this crowding
and lighted fury of the trains emerging
out of the roaring tunnels of your veins.

These wings are birds born of the thoughts in your brain
the thick blue crowding of pigeonwings upon
towers belabored by the sun.

Feel your arms shoot and feather from the shoulder
into the skill of gulls overhead and over
steel and the bridges; tread softly under
footsoles the small dust filled with sparrows.

This is the thought of your brain made jagged
into a city and the thought of other men, the various pleading
multilingual noise of seawhistles
comes out of the whole world under these bridges into the mind.

Turn comrade once

for you will never find elsewhere the aching eyes
and the familiar pain marked on the lips of men
but grief written hieroglyphic upon hostile foreheads.

Here remain the brothers of your heart, salute them;
here are the picket lines and the bright jangle
of children fighting, the glitter of streets, the houses in
windrows,

here also the broken stairs and the fire and the rat
and here the impenetrable sheen of office windows;

but also you shall find here understanding for your speech
among many of the same flesh as your flesh
spoiled by the same poison. Forever

here are the beauty and pain fit for your eyes therefore turn them
wanderer

finally from a hill at the edge of Jersey,

before departing salute your city
left hanging behind over waters.

II.

Comrade, go through the flatlands and the pallid country,
the reeds and marshes and the tar-paper bungalows
set in a row and with roofs shingled in two blended colors,
the bastard towns conceived in dirt. Go further,
go a day's journey to the other America,
breasted and milky earth, made of fruits and fat hills,
breeding woodchucks, hearing the bark of foxes. This is a land
divided between the buckwheat and the wheat,
white and green with the flowering, gold with rewards in
autumn,
milky with breathing cattle; and the Susquehanna
feeds brown rainwater to the rooted corn,
slips gently over mountains, spreads thin to the sun;
steams vaporous in the air, climbs into cloud, comes gently
pressing its flanks against the flanks of mountains,
closes the valley from the sky and falls in rain;
so to the corn again.

Fifty miles to the south
it is known, the pulpy flesh of men makes war upon coal in the
mines
and grapples with iron. In these pastures
there are no stones, there are no enmities.
Tender earth turns easily under the plow,

fecund under the male blade of the plow,
seeded and starred with young blades, later thick and singing
and the wind moves in the wheat like many snakes.
Clotted on furry stems in the hedge
sweetly the blackberries darken. The land loves its men.

The ruddy flesh of men grows out of red soil
and eats it, tasting new grain,
nipping the new kernel of the wheat with teeth
edged and hungry against the milk of the kernel.
These are the enjoyers of the earth, who feel
in their forking limbs, in the forking bones of their hands
and their feet, in the fibers of their hands
and feet, how the deep root goes down
forking in many branches, clenched on the guts of the earth.
They wear the earth in the creases of their hands.

How shall you speak the speech of these men how meet them
how read the meanings in their eyes how find them
how come to an understanding with their eyes?
Their tongues are heavy with an elder language
the slow tune of the water seeping among roots and of the
grass-blade creeping upward and of the
ripened apples falling softly among grasses.
How shall you speak to them, comrade, flesh of metal and
jangling, quick flesh of the city?

But these
love the richness of life, desire food and sweet clothing,
the noise of strong children, the dazzle and knowledge of travel,
health and a roof and walls; these have a need of some love
and a little rest, like a sweet seed on the tongue, to savor before

death.

Desire of your desire, beat in the heart like your heartbeat;
the bony knuckle bent with the selfsame tendon
and the bodies making love with familiar gestures;
and the bodies starving, seen behind the wried mouth
hidden in strangers sits our brother the skeleton
and all men grin alike.

These are made and jointed with old flesh and fed with blood
and they are beset, they dwindle, they perish, they pass;
the flesh of hogs is less than corn and the corn goes to waste;
the milk of cattle is less than the price of grain;
the yellow apples rot making many flies dizzy with drunkenness.
The women of the farmers spread empty beds with clean linen
for strangers, for the casual money of strangers.

Say then to these, there is no miracle of help
fixed in the stars, there is no magic, no savior
smiling in blatant ink on election posters;
only the strength of men, only the twigs bound together
invent the faggot, only the eyes that go seeking
find help in brother eyes. Say only
the spirit of men builds bridges of the spirit,
the hands of men contrive united splendors,
the need of men shall awaken thunderous answers;
and so fall silent. Leave silence among them. They will not have
listened
to your words or being diverted with lies will not understand
you;
they are easily befooled, soon betrayed; they have not yet come
clutching at wheatstraws, upon the end of disaster,
the bloody ultimate ruin, the wise destruction immitigable
strength.

Leave them their precious grain, the useless fruitage,
the money dribbling from their hands, the land
sucked from beneath their feet by the mouth more greedy than
earthquake
of the blind worm of the age. Leave thought among them,
say to them your word and leave the word among them and
leave them.

III.

Go wandering northward on the adventurers' track
who with fringed feet combed the Canadian dark
misguided by stars, misled by the polar star;
parceling their flesh among fields.
Here have their sprinkled heirs forgotten French laughter
stiffened upon the worn mouth puckered sourer
than tidal fields; and every whisper
makes war on brother whisper. Here divided
men have no voice more than the muted wave
unending on the shores.

And here the narrow moaning the little wave
rises divided between the ripple and ripple
the land divided by the arms of sea,
the tongues of land divided by the stream,
the farm divided by the tide; advancing
the moon, advancing and retreating, stripes water
with in and out; mutely the tide
cleaves the sand between wet and dry.

Here whispers lonely breath here find humility
marked on the map, written in the towns with saints' names
by the thin rivers and the stink of fish
and the yellow bricks of the true church; pray for us sinners,
pray for us now and at the hour of our death;

but not
that we being men rebuke this incarnation
and the wise ape in the mind; but not
that we are insolent and proud in flesh; but pray for us
pray for us; we the sons of the French adventurers
salt and dry codfish beside a salty stream
here with no buyers; here our bread
stands to the flies; here our children
have no teeth, live on the thin flesh of fishes
and the pallid taste of Christmas berries plucked by the roadside
while waiting for the cars and money of tourists;
and because we have no teeth in our heads with which to bite
therefore priest pray for us, you sitting in the house of yellow
bricks
which we have made beside the church of yellow bricks
which we have built and made bright with decorations of metal
and three white saints, and which we have given a tower
sheeted with tin, and of which we are proud because it is fine.

Priest give us good words and make intercession
to the Virgin that she may make intercession
since now every hour is the hour of our death.

IV.

Wanderer ending eastward
the spine of the eastern mountains trails to nothing
the tide runs outward eastward into nothing
the narrow fences of farmland dwindle eastward
only the sea remains. Nothing remains.

This is land's end;
scream on the wind cormorant come cormorant
the sharp beak splitting the fish come seagull
come the small tern wheeling about land's end
and the crane stirring thin waters with feet of blue glass
feathering the wind and lonely upon the ocean;
come birdcry here is the heart here is the heart's cry, answer
along the ultimate and starving beaches
birdcry the voice of men.

And the children
go past on the wind crying in small voices
unheard blown seaward, shrill birdvoice of the children
buy this buy this, and the small claws of children
shaking a handful of green peas.

How shall this question be answered,
comrade, what strength shall repair this desolation
what shape of words what syllable bring courage
speak the united heart of men, unless birdcry
stringing long echoes on the empty air,
futile birdcry blown off the end of the world.

Here to the sea's edge, to the salt and bitter water,

descend the narrow birches left naked by fires,
the birch most tender and human flesh of all trees
reduced to essential bones of destruction; ah they are dead,
the white birch is dead and never again
puts forth the silver underside of leaves on the wind
or springtime tassels of the birch. They are dead,
the white trees, human birches; who shall call them
to lift the slaughtered branches upon the sky,
the murdered root to rise again by the sea's edge
at the world's end.

Only remember,
wanderer, under the murdered and slender trees
white bodies given over to slaughter, remember
only the fireweed, comrade, the glory in burnt places,
the sharply colored torchbearers, the new warriors,
the green and flowery resurrection, the fireweed
marching over burnt hills down to the sea's edge. Remember
resurrection riot among the roots of the birches, resurrection
out of the white and black bones of burnt trees, resurrection.

Remember
with what a brave necessity the fireweed
answers birdcry down the desolate beaches
speaks to the aimless wind the heart's red syllable,
blooms on our bones. Let the fireweed answer,
comrade, and so we may lie quiet in our graves.

To the Virgins.

Whatever arrow pierce the side
Or what confusion wring the mind,
Cherish the silver grin of pride
To stiffen your mouth in a whistling wind.

Love will devise you tricks of pain
Like fires, and gentleness a curse;
Never transcend the armored brain,
Never let in the universe.

Who lose their weapon find a wolf;
Who conquer wear a jagged wreath;
Therefore be guided; love yourself
And show the pleasant world your teeth.

Crocea Mors.

Name of a sword: golden death,
golden, swoop over me, let the clear blood golden
fatten the earth, let the cruel wing go over
immemorial, and quietude succeeds
and steep innumerable intervals of reeds
slant upward from my eyes against the sky
sharpened with sunset yellow as any sword;
but wearily wearily the ascending bird
now darkens on the sky and wheeling
wing and wing over, lifting wing and wing,
the sky wheels down its admirable crash of gold,

the sword wears blood.

Life let out

remain forever lost; no more than the moon drinking water
ever allow the wantoning blood return,
only lie quiet like the spilled golden moon
left in the sea forever. So torn
float glistening on air, so pass the spirit,
the pain so melt, confusion so dissolve,
so quietly among the water and reeds
under forgotten sunlight perish; so come
ultimately to quietude, so die.

Spartacus 1938.

Thaelmann is buried under the peat bog,
under the rain, under the tufted grass.

He is buried under crisscross tracks of birdfeet
made all day by the moorhens as they pass.
He lies below the feet of prisoners
come all day from the concentration camp;
the lean marsh iris and the angled sedge
set their roots in grey and green water;
Thaelmann lies where the shovel's edge
crisscross cuts peat all day long
and the night smooths it over with water.

But Thaelmann is buried under Moabit
lying living in the heavy stone.

When Romans killed Spartacus the gladiator
they did not put him under earth alone;
along the Roman road they set a cross,
a little way beyond another cross,
so for some miles, and every cross a man;
so the tall gladiators on the Roman road
blackened until the Roman flocks of crows
turned from the new corn in the spring.

This was done to Spartacus and the moneyless men
in the name of sweet peace, order and tranquillity,
in the name of large lands belonging to one man,
the name of grain brought from Egypt to give the poor,
in the name of the rich man's house, the name of his sleep
and the fat ancestral spirits of his gods.

This was done in the name of the smoke on altars.
Spartacus being a slave was beaten with rods.

And the slave lives in the ergastulum
and the slave lies chained to the outer door,
and the slave wears away the palms of his hands
working for the Roman state. Spartacus
lies with his heart buried at the foot of the whipping post.

(But Thaelmann is held in Moabit,
the door is locked, the key is lost, the cause is lost.)

The prisoners from the concentration camp
leave wet footmarks on the rainy moor.

They never had a key to open the door,
and when they leave, they leave by the back door of a bullet,
the coffin sent home with an official seal;
but the prisoner shall set his heel
into firm earth, but he shall stand firm,
but he shall live by the lean gun
and he shall earn his death like honest bread
and there shall be bread. And this shall be
in our lifetime, in our bitter lifetime, Thaelmann.
The grass shall sleep upon the moor.

Assault the door, break down the door, break open the door.

The Princess in the Ivory Tower.

The Prince's voice, faint at the edge of sunlight,
where the clear sun leans backward from the night,
thin as a bird, faint as the fading air:

Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair,

and I will climb up to the height of heaven,
and I will let the wind blow over my shoulder,
and I will let the stars drift through my hands,
coming to the magic house, the ivory chamber,
coming into the circle of dreams and drowning mist,
and wind will blow out both the witch's eyes.

Rapunzel,
let down your golden hair,

make a ladder for me to enter heaven,
make a ladder for me to dally with the stars,
make a stairway through the dizzy air.
There shall be no root upon the earth for my stair
and I shall sway between the sun and moon
and all the merry stars shall ring in tune
when I come in, when I come to the ivory room.

Let down your hair, let down your golden hair,
that I may be free from the murder at my foot,
that I may be free from the truth upon my eyes,
that I may be free from the worm at my heart's root.

Twentieth-Century Americanism.

Lies have been told about this American blood
making it seem like laughter or like some animal
couched with a golden throat in the desert. Our roots
push apart the bones of an Indian's skull. Arrowheads
strike fire and flint sparks out of us. These lies,
these Indian rivers, these arrowroot sweet waters
seething in the blue flag. We have not drunk these rivers,
we have not chewed and eaten this earth. These ghosts
do not walk in our veins with painted feet.

Come now all Americans
kiss and accept your city, the harsh mother,
New York, the clamor, the sweat, the heart of brown land,
the gold heart and the stone heart, the beast of American blood,
the cat stretching out before a borrowed fire
beside the steam heat, in apartment houses.

We are not the dark cheekbone of the Indian
and there are no painted feathers for our killing
which happens grimly, beside clapboard and raw steel.
We are not the stone ribs underneath Manhattan
but we come and go swiftly in the sick lights of subways;
men with narrow shoulders, children and women,
Italians, Jews, Greeks, Poles, and even Anglo-Saxons
all worn down to the thin common coin of the city.
And our minds are made after new electric models
and we have no proud ancestors.

(Lost, lost
the deerskin heritage, the pioneer musket,
barn dance, corn harvest, breakers of new soil.
Lost the great night and thin assertive song
up from the campfire, lynxes drinking the Hudson,
bobcat in Westchester. What fish swim Manhattan,
what clean and naked rivers? lost and lost
the homespun and the patchwork quilt, the bread
risen in the home oven and smelling new.
Do not claim this for us. We have the radio.
We have the cat and the tame fire.)

Beside
the bedroom window long trains ride,

the harsh lights come and go outside.

And our minds

and the minds of our children. Give us the World Series,
the ballplayer with thick nostrils and the loose jaw
hanging heavily from a piece of chewing gum,
and when the baseball is over give us no time;
fill our mind with the Rose Bowl and Yale and Notre Dame
leaving no time for thought between the baseball and football
seasons.

Feed us music to rot the nerves, make us twitch with music,
burrow with music beneath the comfortless brain and beneath
the aching heart and the worn heart and beneath
the honest gut and rot the gut with music
in the snake of nerve that sits in the knee reflexes,
wriggle in the dust with the snake's belly. All night
delight us with the yellow screaming of sound.

And give us

the smile, the glitter of rich houses, the glitter,
porcelain teeth and skin smoothed by diffused lighting,
(skin-cream, face-food, oil of Peruvian turtles
bright and grinning out of all the subway advertisements)
the dark movie house and old cigarette smoke
and the knee of the stranger sitting in the next chair.
If you close our burlesque houses, we will reopen them
and watch twelve hours long the one crude smile
and the same silk uncover the same thigh.

And from the film

borne home to bed with the familiar wife
weary and good, and burrowing into night

into her breast with the blind face of a child;
out from the bed to the familiar daylight
the invoice the slick glass desktop the worn counter
and madam these goods guaranteed not to stretch.
Borne from the bed to sewing machines, taxis, and the building
trades,
and if you wear a pencil behind your ear long enough you don't
even feel it,
just like eyeglasses. And we go home at night
bearing in two hands like the image of god
the dear shelter, the clothing, the bright fine food.
And daily, daily, we expend our blood.

Give us this day our daily bread.
Give the pillow the aching head,
give Harlem midnight the hot bed.

Let not the trespass keep us from
the clean new streets of kingdom come.
Forgive the sin, forgive the slum.

But when summer comes
we will bathe in the city waters, pronounced free of sewage
only the doctors who swam there came down with a rash.
And in winter we will go skating in Central Park
being sorry for the animals who live in cages,
and the trees will be blue. And the towers will look blue on the
snow,
the wet fine street will shine like a salmon's back.
And we shall see spring bloom upon the tops of skyscrapers.
We shall be happy. We shall buy silk and new ties
walking in the sun past bright stone. This is New York,

our city; a kind place to live in; bountiful; our city
envied by the world and by the young in lonely places.
We have the bright-lights, the bridges, the Yankee Stadium
and if we are not contented then we should be
and if we are discontented we do not know it,
and anyhow it always has been this way.

Submarine.

Water ringing like a bell
Curls the sunlight in its shell
Of a sea-worm hardly seen,
Long and luminously green.
Days that flare and nights that twinkle
Pass upon the sky to sprinkle
Gold and silver casually
On the serpentining sea.
Under hollow water I
Watch the bright and watery sky
Where a sun appears to swim;
Little fishes follow him,
And contemplate on wriggling tails
Each small perfection of their scales.
Crabs have feathers on their eyes;
This one spreads them out and lies
Underneath a flickering fin,
Sucking all the ocean in.
Round and round me go the fish

With a contemptuous silver swish,
Watching superciliously
The hermit crabs walk over me,
Each a spider, thin and black,
With a snail's house on his back.
Seaweed flowers to my hands
Out of variable sands
Where silkily and wetly slide
Purple shells with whelks inside.
Nothing in the sleepy sea
Complacent is as whelks can be,
So blissfully they eat and drink;
They do not talk, and if they think
Such lordly purple thoughts are those
Ocean imperially glows
Around each whelk become a star.
Marble all their faces are,
Benevolent and shiny slabs.
The sensitive and poet crabs,
Jointed, Japanese and frail,
Come and nibble a whelk's tail.
By this small symbolism see
Each great man suffers from a flea;
Whelks are statesmen in the sea.

Prayer against Indifference.

When wars and ruined men shall cease

To vex my body's house of peace,
And bloody children lying dead
Let me lie softly in my bed
To nurse a whole and sacred skin,
Break roof and let the bomb come in.

Knock music at the templed skull
And say the world is beautiful,
But never let the dweller lock
Its house against another knock;
Never shut out the gun, the scream,
Never lie blind within a dream.

Within these walls the brain shall sit
And chew on life surrounding it;
Eat the soft sunlight hour and then
The bitter taste of bleeding men;
But never underneath the sun
Shall it forget the scream, the gun.

Let me have eyes I need not shut;
Let me have truth at my tongue's root;
Let courage and the brain command
The honest fingers of my hand;
And when I wait to save my skin
Break roof and let my death come in.

I the Philosopher.

It has befallen me to see a thief
With a lovely body crucified; a perfect matter, deserving
contemplation;
A pleasure edged bitterly; the flux of things,
The conscious spirit, or the eddying star,
The tangle of air and empty hollows of time
Knotted into being, can never arrange a pattern
Of rock or tree, of subtlety of tree
Spun greenly, of the barbarian rectitude of rock,
So fine as the serpentine flesh and mere two lines
Of crucifixion. How the willow flesh
Grows keen and admirable; naked
The twig, peeled white and twisted, stingingly helpless;
How every accidental bone and tendon
Serves a divine order; how clearly the harpstring cords of
armpits
Swoop out, how musically sweetened ring with pain.

The slave takes three days dying, no longer lovely
Than one day and the following mist that abandons him
Black insult on the dawn; for presently bloodily wrenching
Pain crammed in a swollen mouth corrupts him; no longer
The early heroic impossibilities of the body,
No longer the virginal touch or delicate passing wingtip
And first sweet feathers of pain; so briefly go the graces,
And all his agonizing fires of perfection
Die pitiful as the brittle claws of dead birds.

Loveliness tickles the brain
And faint fans of nerve-endings in the skin,
Blunted by sunlight recurring obscene with flies.
We leave the slave. White fungus threads of thought

Detain him in the mooned and planetary spaces of the mind.
For what profound or starry, what whirling spheres,
Rings and celestial candles, what coruscations, what fluid
Convoluted and ancient chaos must bend down
To make the quaint sinews of a man and nail him
Beautifully on a cross, and make my eyes,
My speculating eyes, my tremulous presence,
All for providing a lovely sharpened moment
In the long universe; unless for nothing
While still this jewel consummation rewards the womb
Of all blind ages. This is a miracle.

Necrophile.

These loves are buried under the heavy wind.
Sand trails upon them, empty bodies
Burned in the sun to outcast sand, a rubble
Of aching desert, futile swords and potsherds
Broken in whispering dust. Processionally
The shape of men, lifting great arms, the rippling of arms,
Falls into death. The bleeding discords
Become predestinate music; brutal flesh
Grows memorable by death and resurrection
Into the imperishable toy of history.

Glass may be stricken with music,
Sing like a cricket shrilly; then escaping
Sift sand between fingers.

From trickling dust arisen they will come
Into the significant fabric of my body.
I am contrived out of drifting ghosts; I am fed
On the great pride of Egypt, the armored snake
And sacred beetle, the jewel Scarabaeus
Upon imperial foreheads; the angular limbs, the hawks
Hieratically smiling wisdom; quiet Pharaohs,
Dark flesh and bright enamel; a thin mouth
Stopped with a bitter dust of spices.

These
In gold beatitude, with the violent head of Akhnaton
Wry and human, shrivel in priestly linens
Drawn tight against the tooth of the jackal
Anubis, among the pale eyes of the dead.

I suck bodily at desire;
Nations of broken clay, Sumer and Akkad,
The harsh virility of stone-bearded kings,
Stone Sargon, membered like the bull,
Great scrolled stone, muscles and eyes of stone,
And godlike, eyed like the blind rock;
Loved also by Ishtar and gods, drinkers of blood,
Squat Assyrians on the sun-dried ziggurats;
Loved by the warm female moon, Ishtar, the cone
Set upon earth between two rivers.

Tigris and Euphrates,
The yellow crawling beast, the perilous river,
The rivers yellow as baked clay, together
Like the forked loins of a man, engender
Bearded and curled bulls, flat and stony lions,

Until repeated nations tread
Harsh cuneiform in the broken earth.

After such tortuous passion the clear gods
Flare upon me; immemorial Apollo
In delicate flesh a precious substance of silver,
A thin wire sounding, walks in the curving sky;
The rank and burning goat, a dreadful ardor
Clasped closer than flesh to the spirit, called Pan,
Lies in the night; all these are dead,
Cold at the core of the planet, lost upon air,
Spiraled into vapor, curled out and lengthening, blown
Subtler than wind; ineluctable, dragon destruction
Eats up the sun; these are dead,
And pass with the dry ash of many Greeks, Themistocles
Dead of drinking bulls' blood in Persia, Aristotle,
Whose thin smiling lips pass softly
In the color of my mind.

Fierce blood informing the veins
Beats on a measured drum; my tolling heart
Beats the bronze bell of Rome; the legion in unison
Bronze; and the trumpet throat of Antony
Ringing bronze, and the screaming eagle
Stern as a sword; and the bronze amphitheater bearing dark
arches
Groined with lean ribs of metal. Issuing, the lion
Brings clangor and killing over the arena
Lifting a brazen heaven; the scornful neck of a god
Bending transcendent eyes, embodied
Corinthian bronze, bright as a wolf.

This Rome is calamitous metal,
Smelted with kingly sweat, refined in annihilation,
Cast in a flowing fire like the strange bronze
Out of the temple treasury; integral,
This Rome, of secret Etruria and the clear mind alloyed
Into the strict admirable shape of a trumpet.

I have listened to the bright pattern of a trumpet
Crying against barbarians, I have seen
Horses reared over my body pawing at air
In the crazy silence of lightning; I in my body
Have taken the fierce weight of a man on the Roman sword.
And I have felt the javelin dividing my body
Sharp as sea water; no dream, but a fire
In the remembering blood, while seven hills
Live in the wavering air, who possess my spirit
With thunderous profiles, like secular echoes of the Caesars
Carved imperially in resounding brass.

The crested eagles are broken; Rome is fallen.
The temple roof has fallen in. Survival
Comes like a miser to the dead.
These had cruel hands, the strong bone jointed to bone,
Sinew and nerve shaped to a weapon; narrow bodies
And twisting lips, and nostrils sucking air,
And secret eyelids; now in immortal marble
The immense and silent thunder of that blind stare
Fronts life; and these were the semblance of male swords
Now broken; these with the sharp flesh of emperors
Impaled desirous nations; insecurely
Their blunted fingers fumble at my thought
Softly as a nuzzling child.

With the passion of dead faces
They crave a thin vitality; Tiberius, hot and ruinous,
The acrid mouth of Nero; curling warm laughter
In the mouth of Lucius Verus; Hadrian's lover,
A face of honey, bitterly haunted.
The peering thin mask of a boy
Pursues, made of delicate bones and lips; Caligula,
The inconsiderable fragment of divinity.

The voices fall away like dreams; they wander
Imponderably as dreaming. They are withered
Like dead grass trivially; and the great brazen throat of alarums
Whispers only a sound of rasping silver
Like wind against metal. Long after,
In signs and wonders, the Emperor Julian despairing
Comes to make figs of thistles, gold of wheatstraw
And gods of rotten dust.

Bitter philosopher,
Broken upon the fangs of unmerciful beauty,
Tattered by loving, shaken like a rat by strength,
A leopard of defiance, spotted fire
Leaping at spears; a shrill steel-colored eagle
Screaming the human brain against the unanswering sky,
And trapped, snared, shattered like leaves, destroyed,
dishonored,
Cast among unavailing gods and abortive temples
In the blank desert, to die of a fever
And the fever of his thought, and the world
Lost in a desert.
This was the gallant flesh and excellent pain of humanity,
Julian, who loved the dead.

They are betrayed,
Tricked softly by desire, led along easy ways
And delicate alcoves, fattened upon splendors,
Enriched to the fine artifice of many perfections
For an outrageous rapine. Arising
A bubble of spirit blown from dying lips
Stares with lost eyes at defeat. Frustration
Compels the inveterate custom of universes
To burst in wandering fire.

Violated by daggers,
Disdained, flung askew on the chequered tiles of the Senate
House,
Empty as a sanctuary, striped with purple blood
And broken like tinsel glass, Julius Caesar
Comes upon the hurried salvage of three slaves
Bearing homeward a robe of purple and a lean corpse
With one arm hanging down.

Silent intensities of thought like the track of a meteor
Come to destruction.
The swift fire, the conquering passion, laughter cracking the
planet
To its roaring kernel, shaking the long seas, lifting
A superb act and a miraculous intention
Come to destruction.
And the thin curve of eyelids flickering,
Thin shoulder-bones, and the structural skull,
And the unimaginable contrivance of hands
Precious as masculine gems; and a recondite mouth
Unrelenting, unloving, sweeter than fire, and smiling,
Come at last to a sudden flurry of wet blood,

A slack arm swinging, in the dusty air
Lean, corded, swinging down and up and down,
And presently to nothing.

There is no more to say
Unless his forehead caught a journeying star
That rose above the burning. There were tears
And blood, the strange threatening of blood, and a long wail
Of something inexpressibly old and sad,
All night, the moaning Jews. A star grew between
The two cupped hands of Caesar, in whose reflection
He shone a manifest god. There is no more
Than truth, than lie, to hold the ominous wave
Curling above the world. No death
Shall crash upon me, nor the claws of doom
Pluck at my body and rive the shuddering spirit
From its last love, while within the star
Immortal Caesar lives. There is no longer
The barricade for chaos; no fabricated sphere,
A turning planet, thin reality,
Thin color on the wind,
Ghost, fading ghost;
And desolation.

Snow in Madrid.

Softly, so casual,
Lovely, so light, so light,

The cruel sky lets fall
Something one does not fight.

How tenderly to crown
The brutal year
The clouds send something down
That one need not fear.

Men before perishing
See with unwounded eye
For once a gentle thing
Fall from the sky.

Cadence on a Stolen Line.

Rain rings in water silverly,
rain rings in water;
whether the sky lets down a thread
of spider weaving grey with a little light
from thick clouds spinning water;
whether the river puts upward lilies thinly
and faint tulips, sharp sprays of water,
flowers whose blood in miraculous chilly courses
freezes the air, silverly comes the rain
and silver, and hesitating, lines of ripples
crossed with a shower;
evasive water shines and the shore grows pale,
the blunt clouds luminous; taste now in the air

diffused and smiling rain.

Night-Piece.

I shall make rings around you. Fortresses
In a close architecture of wall upon wall,
Rib, jointed rock, and hard surrounding steel
Compel you into the narrow compass of my blood
Where you may beat forever and be perfect,
Keep warm. The blood will keep you warm, the body
Will curl upon you not to let the air
Sting you with ice. And you shall never be wounded
By your bright hostile business of living, while
I and my charitable flesh survive.

Interminably
I shall come with windings and evasions, I shall bar
My lover from the aggression of a star
Cold, unperturbed, and meaning death. Nor shall you
Suffer one touch of pain or recollection of evil
While you are in my bed; nor shall you suffer
The old iniquities of the universe
If I will have you safe.

Now the first ring
Is the devious course of my blood going all around you
And you with a blind mouth growing in my flesh
In the likeness of a child. You cannot break free,

For I have locked a little of your life
Into my life; and the second ring to enclose you
My breast and arms; then a smooth round of light
And a wall winking with sleek and brittle windows
With darkness cowering at them; the cold starry endless enemy
Crowding you in, crushing my arms around you
To keep off black terrors. For one more magic circle
I have the world.

Now in a ring of ocean
Far away, there is a hollow island holding
A flat blue pool, holding a bird. They kill the bird
To find a round egg covering one round nutshell
That hides the smallest yellow oval grain
Of wheat that ever had a life for kernel;
They shall not find your life. Lie and keep warm
In your own rolling planetary shell; keep warm,
My lover. Lie down lover. If there is peace
Arrested in any memorable fragment of time
I have shut you in with it and drawn a circle.

Survey Mankind.

If we could set our teeth in the hide of America,
clasp her fat hills to our faces and be nourished by them,
we could not love her better. Along roads
we have gone loving the grassroot in the ditch
and the good smell of grass burning, and the fires.

We have touched this country; we have seen it; we have heard it
with our ears.

We have known the hooked rugs. We have watched the honey
bright golden standing for sale. Tumbleweed
blows along the American highways like our minds.

And we have counted the places, one by one;
the desert towns, the blown trees edging the prairie
meant to break the wind, and the abandoned filling stations
and the places where jackrabbits jump out of the night.
We have understood all these things and held them in our minds,
and we have counted the people, one by one;
the faces seen under lights; the church sociable; the miners at
evening
and the boy behind lunch counters in the blue early morning.
And we have spoken to them, one by one.

We have seen America staring in the desert
and the pinched child's face at the cabin door.
Look at this with us;

under sun and rain
ponder upon the mountains and the plain.
Weigh in your hands the gold and pain.

And in Dakota the houses have turned yellow,
the paint scoured from their sides with dust; the earth
baked and split like a bruised lip; the grass
sends roots five feet down for water; (the roots remain,
only the roots remain).

And elsewhere rain is shaken from the edge of leaves.

Look at this with us.

We have lain awake
all night and listened. We have loved the sound
of the corn grown out of American ground.
We have climbed into our cars and driven out
past many telegraph poles, along the sleek highway
shining so well it looks wet ahead of us.
And we will make America a fine place,
a province for the men in it; we will make
the gold corn and the water to be for all.

Come and see.
Partake of this bread. Come riding. Devour this country
with your eyes and heart, the barren and fertile soil.
Come and see the red earth and the black earth and the
desolation.

The grasshopper cries forever. Our ears
are filled with the dry rustling of leaves. All night
the sharp tin sound of grasshoppers possesses us.

Sit down in the desert, take the sagebrush in your hand;
here are big jackrabbits and birds with black and white wings,
and the cactus, and the red rock. Euphorbia
points heavily at the sun. In the desert we suck oranges.

O dear darkness
descend upon us, blacken the sky with night,
remove the sun from our eyes. Darkness
come up in the desert with wind. And we shall
and we shall drink green and yellow pop out of bottles

and in order to buy hamburgers we shall stop at the next roadside stand.

They will give us a place to wash, because we wear America ingrained in our faces.

And we shall go again. We shall go through the rain, the silver sweet mist being about us again, the mountains being about us; the snow breathing sharply in the air.

And we shall come to the wide golden western cities of the plain put between mountains and sea and spiced with orange trees, the persimmon, the peach, the white and purple figs.

Many pounds of grapes are bought for very little money. We shall see the Pacific like soft cream upon the pebbles and scatter with our fingers the wave's edge warm on the shore. Behind us lies spread the body of America, corn in Iowa, rice in the South, and the wheatfields, the fruit and bread. The precious bread. The bread.

Break a wheatstraw and bring it home.

This is your share of America.

The earth is possessed and used evilly; the many rivers make paid lightning over wires. The many trees headless have gone heavily down the river.

Break a stalk of cactus and take it home with you and do not question why the thorns cause you pain; this is what you are given out of the plain.

Now with me bow down and love this earth

which you have not had for your own; touch it with your forehead.

Repair its wounds with the piety of your fingers.

You will make it a fine earth belonging to its people.

You are essential here. You are the rock. The Mississippi flows through your arteries from skull to ankle-bone.

Your tongue is taught by these birds;

the grasshopper

ticks in your blood. You are by this begotten autochthon; earth-engendered; acacia of this soil, red flowers of this desert.

Now with me

bow and set your mouth against America

which you will make fine and the treasure of its men,

which you will give to the workers and to those who turn land over with the plow.

The Alchemist.

In a jealous delight

I adore in the sun

Thin grapes holding light

In a sweet golden skin.

A miraculous whirl

Or an ardent vapor,

The gold flames curl
At the tip of a taper.

Gold circles for eyes
Look out of birds;
The sleek beetle flies
Spreading gold shards.

Autumn wears fiery gold,
Orange and sullen,
Velvet as marigold,
Hazy as mullein,

Whose warm flowers mellow
The pungent fern;
Silver and yellow
Their tall fires burn.

Thick honey and amber
Color the air;
Like a tawny brown ember
Pheasant wings flare

With a feathered gold whirl
Out of shining rocks
At the fierce-colored fur
And gold eyes of a fox.

—The magnificent smith
Whips his gold sweet and cruel,
To a thorny frame with
His pride for a jewel.

His hands and sorrow
Shape various gold
Chaste as an arrow,
Or florid, enscrolled

For the lusting of kings;
Filed sharp into dragons
With filigree wings;
Or a revel of flagons,

Blown clear like a petal,
Or hammered in bars,
Such sorcerous metal
Lives in the stars.

Green moonlight has gold,
And gold, the sun;
My fire is cold;
I have none.

Il pleure dans mon coeur.

How shall I keep the rain from my eyes;
how shall I walk discreetly in the sky,
keep my feet safe and keep my honor dry,
how shall I flourish comforted and wise;

who will guard me from the slow rain coming down

dappling the air with light;
who will keep the rain from my sight
and who will shut my door that I may not drown

overtaken by the soft flood of the rain
that fingers patiently the eyes and hair,
and when shall I no longer stare
at a starred melancholy windowpane. . . .

Only turn your lips to my lips and let your hair
lie in my hand or tangle in my hand,
and fall asleep, and let your body stand
between my sorrow and the weeping air.

Lament for Evolution.

Apollo, having been given my desire,
my ancient passion, my desire, my lover,
I find my answer is no more than emptiness
and a bitter taste; yet praising Apollo, craving
only the soft and friendly unconsciousness of the beasts
outdistanced, I give thanks; I return thanks for the admirable
delusion,
the bright and soundless explosion of my world
which might have meant fires, instead collapsing
flaccid into the shape of bitterness.

Never the intrinsic sun spawned in a body

so tight and perfect a serpent, Apollo;
never your sunlight on your lover's lip
stung with so cruel, so salt and beautiful a virtue;
never before so nakedly pain
struck the eyes sculptural. Bitter crusts of salt
freeze my eyes white and cold. Apollo,
never your sunlight, never your lean marble
stretched shuddering like my body like a wire. Pure, narrow,
the mind extends itself against the winds,
barren as its own smiling tooth.

Bitterness in the tooth
devours and poisons; whose flesh envenomed
yields blood to the cannibal maceration of self
feeding on self. Bitterness on the lips
tastes more profound than kisses. Bitterness
seeps down the throat into hollows, pits of destruction, laboring
channels
where my fine pain creates itself to remain alive
with a sweet functional music, while bitterness
mews at my ear like a cat.

Bright, acrid blood upon a bitten tongue,
the fine, ultimate, perfect taste of blood
completes desire. I, feeding upon myself,
lecherous in the satisfaction of myself, pure as a circle
in the round whole of myself, taste my blood;
my mouth, thick and strangling, eats divinity
repugnant to the guts;

these guts being sweet and wholesome,
untroubled by realization, smirking profoundly,

discreetly making flesh, and if at times
confused and bubbling with odd stresses of emotion
they belch and sleep again. They are not I
myself, the nodding, grinning, thinking sack, the impossible
laughter of self against self, created in jelly
to hate and make conjectures.

Topped with brain
the whole blind and happy edifice of guts
tumbles into despair. Besieged with sweet sounds,
enviored by odors, ambushed by delectations,
the brain grows sweetly drunk on itself; thereafter
sits in sour vomit and chews on bitterness.

It is bitterness to know that I am alive;
it is bitterness to find no reason for life, Apollo,
except the subterfuge and apology of dying,
and to fear death, knowing the flesh will crawl,
nerves, bubbling glands, voracious guts, crawl screaming
away from dying. It is bitterness
in knowing life, anticipating death, playing softly with emotions,
to feel the blind slug brain recoil, turn inward,
and love its own contemplating lunatic eyes
sick with disgust; it is I, Apollo.

Japanese Print.

How the pale quiet gulls whitely arrayed on air

make long lines flying; how sweet the scythe,
the blade, the wing; how clearly come the narrow
beloved quiet curvings into sleep.

Absently twilight
trailing upon the endless, blue, predestinate sky
illumines ripples; how the narrow moon
luminous rides the figured air as silver
as slanted water lightly brushed with wings.

Fairer than any waters,
delectable; O cool, forgetful, how little light flows over
shivering along a million wings and stars.

This Woman.

Now do not put a ribbon in your hair;
Abjure the spangled insult of design,
The filigree sterility, nor twine
A flower with your strength; go bare, go bare.

The elements foregathered at your birth
Gave your hard throat an armor for despair,
Burned you and bathed you, nourished you with air,
And carved your body like a tree of earth.

This is the symbol that I shape of you;
Branching from the broad column of your flesh

Into the obdurate and fibrous mesh
Stubborn to break apart and stiff to hew;
Lost at your core a living skeleton
Like sharp roots pointing downward from the sun.

For the Revolution.

This man, this ape with laughter in his mouth,
this ape with salt crusts stiffening his eyes,
this laugher and weeper, mongrel of grief and laughter,
spoiler of flesh, this breed of devastations,
this froth of blood and bone and passion and dreaming
corrupts on the earth; is rotten.

And when panic takes him
he will blacken the sweetness of the earth. And when hunger
takes him
he will eat the members of his children.
He is full of shame; he is foul; he squats among bones.

But he has told me
(this man, this fine miraculous slime, this murder)
he has told me that he will give himself bread;
he has told me that he will make himself a fine house
and there shall be no hatred in it, nor lies.
I have heard his voice. He will have peace and bread.

The man will clean his own blood from his fingers.

He with his own hand will create himself.
He must come gilded with his own redemption.

Who else shall come,
what other shape, what more uplifted spirit,
wing at his shoulder, angel on his lip,
shall come to bury us;

and on this ruin
make the new earth out of pure gold and air
and the new city. For who else shall come;
neither the insect nor the son of god,
not the wise carrion-beetle nor the archangel Gabriel
annunciator of the kingdom of heaven,
nor the archangel Michael with the sword.
Nothing will be done that the hands of man cannot do,
nothing will be digged that he cannot dig with his fingernails,
nothing will be made and eaten without his teeth.

But he has said, this man. I have heard him speak.
He will come out of the black hell of the mine.
He will come out of the fire and forging steel,
the hell of the boiler room, the prison hell,
the whirring hell of the factory; and when he comes
we shall not need archangels. We shall need
only the salt and human loins of this man
and the sweat marking with grime the lines of his palm,
and he will make out of the angry storm,
the brutal stone, the sea, the supple water,
the iron mountains and the fertile soil
the everlasting image of this man.

Obsession.

I have not forgiven my enemy
The splendor of the eyes in his skull
Or that his mouth is good to see
Or that his thought is beautiful.

I have given my hatred food to eat
Thinking his body so fine a thing
One shall not find the milky wheat
Or the new bread more nourishing,

Or more desirable fine gold,
Or lovelier silver thrice refined;
And I have kept me warm in the cold
Hating the valor of his mind.

This hate is honey to my tongue
And rubies spread before my eye,
Sweet in the ear as any song;
What should I do, if he should die?

Sorceress Eclogue.

(Ducite ab urbe . . .)

Now under rainstorm corn is come again
and it shall ripen into the body of my love.

Now birdseed scattered falling makes again the summer
burning with leaves, bringing the pollen grain,
the rain falling like seed the firseed fallen
the honey thick in trees and the smell of rain
and the bird crying alone. I for my lover
cook magic over woodfires to call him home.

If he will come to me with the smell of
woodsmoke and he will come to me with the burning of
leaves and the slow smoke upward in the night,
he will have his skin dappled with the shadow of leaves
faunskin; he will be spotted like the spotted cat
under the turning of leaves dark and bright.

This is magic made with a leaf and a leaf;
by this incantation his body drawn home.

O by the wings of leaves across the city
call him from the thick city roofs;
call him louder than automobile horns
and he will come with his eyes shut walking lightly
over sharp stubble in grainfields

pricking his feet

on light and glittering dead blades

the sun

friendly on the skin of his arms and the sweat
salt on his lip;
sleepwalker my lover by this incantation
he will come sleeping in the sunlight.

(I shall kiss you with your mouth sticky with honey
your eyelids stuck together with sleep;

the summer

shall enclose us in the heavy heat.)

This incantation is made like a blade of corn
and it will shape his body in the air
like the new kernel of the corn stripped bare;
this magic is the tassel of the corn
dripping pollen through the simmering air;

between the willow and the poplar tree
between the willow tree and the oak sapling
tiger striped with dark or gold of leaves
and the rain lying on leaves like shivering glass
the shape of his voice like the round sunlight dropping;
wearing no clothing upon him but the wheaten sunlight
and the good smell of his body;

the sun

glinting on his fingernails.

I am the earth of which the corn is grown.
This incantation shall raise up the corn
and it shall walk upon the feet of a man
and wear the mortal forehead of my love.

And it shall come upon me with a talking
of the warm grass at the passage of my love.

I shall take the ashes of the sacrifice
and cast them backward into river water
and I shall break his body on the altar

Here is my breath come whistling from the lung
That I may speak of the desire of my hands
For other hands, and here is my forehead
Where I keep thought, and here is the flesh of my heart
Where I have gathered blood and pain.
Here are the beautiful agonies of living
Spread before my eyes by the sun and moon
Or generously fed to my ears by the air.
This is the stuff of words and I shall speak them;
Let pain melt the ice from the root of my tongue
And from the roof of my mouth. Let passion
Come in the shape of a sword against winter and set me free.

I will take the curious joints of my fingers
And the innumerable thoughts of my brain
And I will take my hair and my lips and my desires
And the sunsets that have passed before me
And the many odors which have delighted my nostrils.
I will make a burnt offering of all these things
Of which the fire shall strengthen my heart.
Surely I shall feel words thicken upon my tongue
And surely I shall possess the words that are needful to me.

Fly in Amber.

Black sky seeps through the windowpane
And crowds my thoughts behind my eyes,
And lightly in the locked skull lies

Over the arches of my brain.

This is my little cell of light,
Floating in vague and vacant air;
This trivial roof and wall I wear,
Caparisoned against the night.

The floor is friendly brown and warm,
The ceiling sharp and clear and high;
The amiable chairs and I
Are softly hiding from a storm.

Devious lightning at the door
Claws with quicksilver fingertips;
I make thin music with my lips
Against the elemental roar.

While I have light above my head
And silken things upon my skin
The universe will not come in
To whisper answers to my dread,

Or ruin violate the prim
And crystal insecurity
That clocks and china offer me.
The candlelight is growing dim.

Prothalamion.

Who is this who is coming;
not less than the desire of wind
shall the hungry heart desire the sound;
not less than the rain walks
shall he walk upon the barren ground;
who is this who is coming:
the shadow bearing light
the awful spirit bearing brightness
the shadow with the light about his feet;
not less than the sun walks
shall he tread upon the edge of night.

Who is this who is coming
as the blue heron slantwise upon the wind
coasts from edge to edge of the water and reeds
as the feathers spread thin upon the air;
who is this with shining in his hair
who is come quietly as the dripping mist
comes down upon the midnight and makes no sound;
who is this who is coming:
he is quiet as a river running underground.

Open the door of the room to him that is come,
that he may enter quietly and take possession;
make soft the path upon the floor of the room;
open the arms of the woman to him
that he may take possession;
open the body of the woman
that his seed may be acceptable into her womb.

Yet One More Spring.

What will come of me
After the fern has feathered from my brain
And the rosetree out of my blood; what will come of me
In the end, under the rainy locustblossom
Shaking its honey out on springtime air
Under the wind, under the stooping sky?
What will come of me and shall I lie
Voiceless forever in earth and unremembered,
And be forever the cold green blood of flowers
And speak forever with the tongue of grass
Unsyllabled, and sound no louder
Than the slow falling downward of white water,
And only speak the quickened sandgrain stirring,
Only the whisper of the leaf unfolding,
Only the tongue of leaves forever and ever?

Out of my heart the bloodroot,
Out of my tongue the rose,
Out of my bone the jointed corn,
Out of my fiber trees.
Out of my mouth a sunflower,
And from my fingers vines,
And the rank dandelion shall laugh from my loins
Over million-seeded earth; but out of my heart,
Core of my heart, blood of my heart, the bloodroot
Coming to lift a petal in peril of snow,
Coming to dribble from a broken stem
Bitterly the bright color of blood forever.

But I would be more than a cold voice of flowers

And more than water, more than sprouting earth
Under the quiet passion of the spring;
I would leave you the trouble of my heart
To trouble you at evening; I would perplex you
With lightning coming and going about my head,
Outrageous signs, and wonders; I would leave you
The shape of my body filled with images,
The shape of my mind filled with imaginations,
The shape of myself. I would create myself
In a little fume of words and leave my words
After my death to kiss you forever and ever.

Near Catalonia.

We have the sweet noise of the sea at our back
and before us the bitter shouting of the gun;
and the brass wing of aeroplanes and the sun
that walks above us burning. Here we wound
our feet on metal fragments of the bomb,
the sword unburied and the poisoned ground.
Here we stand; here we lie; here we must see
what we can find potent and good to set
between the Fascist and the deep blue sea.

If we had bricks that could make a wall we would use them,
but bricks will break under a cannonball;
if we had iron we would make a wall,
but iron rings and splinters at the bomb

and wings go across the sky and over a wall,
and if we made a barrier with our earth
they would murder the earth with Fascist poison,
and no one will give us iron for the wall.
We have only the bodies of men to put together,
the wincing flesh, the peeled white forking stick,
easily broken, easily made sick,
frightened of pain and spoiled by evil weather;
we have only the most brittle of all things the man
and the heart the most iron admirable thing of all,
and putting these together we make a wall.

Four Elements.

Earth and water, air and fire
Living in hot wombs conspire
To an end; and snarl and mingle
Yellow clay, with spikes that tingle
Watery, blue, an evanescent
Flash of frosty and lactescent
Ice; red iron in a pool,
Cold fireflies, fishes, and the cool
Immeasurable air of breath,
And the strict bones of narrow death;
Lights and lashes in the seas
By the fluke of a forked whale; these
In a place dissolve and seethe,
Shape my name and let it breathe,

The worms feed and stars aspire;
Air, the waters, earth and fire.

Of such flame together met
Is my body's metal set;
Through me gnome and undine wander,
Elf and sylph and salamander
Ride the courses of my blood,
That it ripen red and good;
Gross and subtle element,
Brown or fiery, they are blent
In a carnal alkahest;
Knotted in the fiber nest
Of serpent nerve, the devious
Impulse strikes and sings at us.
Gnomes in caverns of a lust
Lie prurient in itching dust
Till alarums dark or clear
Whirling round a spiral ear
Tick in byways of ourselves
Whispers of the running elves;
Till the architectural
Flesh is blown ephemeral,
Thin as dust and heavy haze,
Or a tissue like a maze,
Where writhing, writhing, out or in
Physical serpents will begin,
Littered by the dragon-snake
Where the earth lips over black,
Hollow out of light; therefrom
Issue serpent and the gnome,
Who threading in a bloody mesh

Play destruction with the flesh.

Craving burns this jointed earth
Like a male and dragon birth;
Animals of iron and stone
Savagely creak and trample upon
These raggedly quicksilver nerves;
This is the end the earthworm serves.

Undines arching like a wind
Fill the circles of my mind
Where the troubling waters hiss
And surge creative; what is this
Echo of myself I see
Swimming drowned in silver sea
Where the ripple moves in rings
And a smothered ocean sings?
Sea-fans painted full of eyes
Watch the fractured waters rise
Crossed with bubbles; at my throat
Musically springs a note;
Hear the water singing thin
Like a watery violin
Flow behind my eyes and make
Flowing light in arrows wake;
Green under corners of the world
Undulate and whiten; curled
Bubbles slightly flower up
In the two hands' sacred cup.
Answers to the water tones
Blow in ribbons through my bones.

Who is this within the sea?
I and undine liquidly
Singing, find a silver one
Changing what my throat has done
Into sound that waters know,
And singing. To this end they flow
Upon me, who surrendering
Hear the undines float and sing.

Sylphs descend a snarling air
Shaggy with the bitter hair
Of storm, blown thin and spidery tangling
Cloud; they bellow with a jangling
Thunder striking sharp and loud
From the savagery of cloud.
Fiery rectilinear
Lightning licks the prickled air,
Whose abrupt and crystalline fires
Crowd my thought with shining wires,
Terse and mental arabesques,
Triangles and twirling disks
That of moving linear wind
Shape fine alchemies of the mind,
Whose slender edifices are
Clearer than a frozen star
Where the soft imponderable ghost
Of plashing air is flared and lost;
Whose echoes, like the glimmering stone
Of a grey and solid sun
Hanging in his liquid sky
Thick and bright as mercury,
Wake the smooth and luminous

Quietude in shivering space.

Here the sylphs unfurl alone,
Each an artifice of bone
Spread against an airless light,
Musical and strict and white;
Tricks of interweaving line
In a cold and silver design
Build within my narrow skull
The geometric miracle
Of thought; and servant to an end
Winds and the rapid sylphs descend.

Salamanders in their fire
Live remembering desire
And pain, and wait to wake anew
The arrow pain that flashes through
Fiery nerves, at thought of whom
Years have nibbled in a tomb;
All the subtle lustrous kings
Strong as dragons, flowerings
Of spider passions, bearing wise
Hands and lips and curving eyes.
What they wanted, what they were
Weigh lighter than the bitter air.
The lovely turning of a head
Goes; and many words have said
This, that valor perishes.

The salamander cherishes
The bodily precise attire
Of living, with intrinsic fire

Cruel at the core, and orange heat
Dancing in the bloody beat;
Poor bodies for a precious fuel
Nourish grief, wherein the jewel
Beast of centered fire resides,
Eyed like honey. And it glides
With the fiery feet and hands
Through these locked and fleshly strands,
Burning, simmering in tears,
And burning. Miseries and fears,
Crawling loves for this are met,
Velleities, perhaps regret;
Here the yellow lizard sends
A sting to answer fiery ends.

Out of tangled element
Only mystery is blent;
Water, earth, and fire and air
Send their servant minister
To conjure fractions of the whole
In one multicolored soul.

The Empress Changes Lovers.

You'd let me fall in a bundle of wet rags
Put off; you'd peel me off like serpent clothing
Flaked, sloughed, discarded, frittered off, but you find
Discarding me, I should be there to plague you

With my faint eyes too easily remembered
Staining your mind like smoke. Thereupon you find
You'll not have me, nor your desire, nor my arrogance
Printed upon your world; nor the smallest part of my flesh
That might serve to speak to you, and for such a riddance
Murder being quietly inadequate, you'll command
And I am dead with surprising public splendors;
That thereby all the abolition you can publish
Of my body, my touch on your arms, my love in your love
And your weak yielding secretly encountered
May trumpet me formally and imperially null.

For you must kill what you can. Let no recollection
Of any time when you were a woman come
Grinning at you with mortality written on bare teeth;
And I made tatters would not survive to alarm you
By so much as the last bone of a finger
Unconsumed that knows your breast. To this end light fires.
Only it will not serve; you shall recall
Forever the tingle and flash of my body embracing you,
The way my strength came forth, the angles of my elbows,
The placing of my ribs, long clasp of thighs
And a flat back; you'll not obliterate
Any of my tricks of touching you to give you pleasure,
And worse for you you'll not forget your pleasure,
As thus and thus you prickled up your skin
And licked out with your rough dry catlike tongue
To which I tasted salt. Kill what you like;
You will not kill the antic of your own body
That remembers me, nor the words, the physical attitudes
And warm rooms, qualities of light, and secretive fabrics
That mean my name; the very smell of my flesh in passion.

But you'll remember, and you will regret
As long as flesh likes pleasant things, and the tenderness
By me created in you will absently come to haunt you
Without a name, and faceless, dumb, and eyeless
Ask for my body.

Will you know where to find my body
Then, will you hold me present to your senses
And hard, and loving, and anything but ashes?
Whatever anodyne you may discover
Will wear another face and personal hands of its own,
Bring you a different touch and new recollections;
Never your special lust for me and its answer,
And the peculiar and lovely delight you had in me; never
The pleasure your senses got from me merely by wanting.
I'm saying you will not have me ever again;
And that your sudden and imperial flesh
Will doubtless find something irrevocable in destruction.

In Praise of Fascists.

What flowers come again
In the track of guns
Spring out of buried men
Whose lost blood runs

Thick and bitter in the root,
Sweet and thin in the stem;

The flowers underfoot
Give thanks to them

Whose numerous gift of death
Feeds liberally
Sweet purple to the heath
And honey to the bee.

And murder's hyacinths
Weave him a crown
By whose beneficence
The bombs come down.

The Lately Dead.

We now in the slanting and sober light of autumn
go out of our bodies. Above us
dwindles the sky. The cloud, the wind
fade, and the eyelid falls; farewell above us
the end of autumn leaves, the sun, the silence,
the troubled swallows in the wheeling air.

Mourn for us, swallow, whether tending
northward spring make the trees misty
or autumn steal again the birds from the sky; O swallow
O dip and flash of wings, O swooping sky
feathered and arrowed, swallow mourn for us
left dry upon the earth; over these bones

pour silver of the moon and of the rain,
clothe them with leaves apparel them with winter
make a new flesh of the snow. Yet not this death
O swallow, traveling bird, shall lie forgotten
here in the narrow valley in the furrow
under the turn of the season. Some to the east
fly with the sound of our name over blue seas; some northward
cry us against the fog and some go seaward
giving our voice to the voice of the seagulls of the Atlantic;
we here slain and splintered cry from the bones of Spain
thinner than the sound of birds and fainter
than the snow alighting and farther
than the last doubtful stars, and unforgotten,
unforgotten, unanswered, glorious, unconquerable.

Little Verse.

Do not speak of him
Lest I leave you
To flow like water
About his doorstep

Or like a moth
Touch his eyelids
With sleepy dust;
Or like a lover

Trouble his hearing

With sweet lust;
Or leave my body
Upon his doorstep.

Division.

Behold how sweetly we have come together;
Rich night and air, the dark embracing air
And union of the ceiling and the floor
Enclosing passion; love, cool formal sheets,
And secret wool of blankets. And so sweetly
We come together; so the clasp, the spasm
Answer each other, suitably invent
Exhaustion sweeter than content.

Is there no more
To say? the body answering a body
In its own fashion perfect as a flower;
Is there no more to say? Forget that I love you,
Call me a stranger made of mud and water
Wrapped around thought; elaborated, contorted
Mud putting forth its horns in guts and organs
And airy nerves; forget me then, think only
Of a fine complicated human creature
Oddly encountered; is your need of it
The mud incarnate? shall I have of you
The lovely mud, unreasoning, the flesh
Beautifully and unimportantly nourished,

While the irrelevant brain stares off into space
At a blank wall; is there no more to say?
I will not eat you; I desire of you
Not to devour your separate nature; never
Shall I suck out your soul. Let us keep lonely;
But I would see the eyes of loneliness
In your eyes meeting me; I would perceive
In this queer universe, life and the spirit,
And from the locked and isolated self
Salute the world outside.

I clamorous, I the imperative,
I the fond conqueror of your love, the lover,
The lion crying in the wilderness,
I conscious of your life, your thought, your soul
(Call it) now hold your body quite as closely
As one can meet another, and the body
Asks and is satisfied, complete, made perfect,
While the brain stares at nothing.

You are not real.
You are like wood and rock, like earth, like satin;
You are a touch, a taste. You are the animal
Gold rippling thighs of horses; or disturbing
And twisting cats; you are the muscles of tigers,
The objective eyes of owls. You are not life;
I am life. I find your accidental body,
I take you for my pleasure, and all's done;
And I am sweetly fed. No more, no more?

Totentanz.

Play sweetly a pavane for the sheeted dead
that on peacock feet they tread again the alleys of the world;
here in the low hour the dead are risen
like smoke like the moon's rags they are uncurled
out of the narrow cellar of their prison;
pipe them up upon the pipes of storm;
let music be whispered strict and discreet;
to silver of the geometric form
their small feet rattle like a castanet.
How beautiful the arches of their feet
articulate the measured minuet.
Click and click upon the flagstones as they pass
their bones beat rhythm slick as bottle glass.

Play tap-dancing for the anklebones of the dead,
shake them out over the seeded world,
let these bones arise and sing;
with what a stripped and expurgated tread
they dance the trees to skeletons of spring;

he slain in the bitter moment between cannon and gun,
he divested of his breath in the lap of desire,
the man eaten blood and body by the sun
and the body fed living to traveling fire;

murdered at birth; in the fine laurel murdered;
the leper and the beaten and the proud,
bastard and pope the fatherless and fathered

wearing this choice democracy the shroud.

Bray now upon the trombone and the horn,
let them jiggle and recoil and leap;
cockcrow incestuous on the barren morn
begets for these beloved children sleep.

Againrising.

The stroke of six
my soul betrayed;
as the clock ticks
I am unmade;

the clock struck nine;
my life ran down
on gears of time
with a sickened sound.

The noonday struck
a note of pride;
spread on the clock
I was crucified.

The clock struck one,
whose spear, whose dart
transfixed my bone
and narrow heart.

The sound of seven
filled me with bells;
I left great heaven
for little hells;

the midnight let
my blood run out
fierce and red
from my opened mouth.

Great chaos came
to murder me
when the clock named
the hour of three.

The dawn grew wide;
the clock struck five,
and all inside
I was alive.

Jewess to Aryan.

Our veins possess variations; our blood
marches to differing tunes. We were conceived
out of varying earth, and each nourished by sweeter waters
than the composite sea. And you descend
the northern streams; nor what swift waters
and yellow populous foam of rivers unroll in Asia

have borne your body. This is not my root
who evolve viciously in the east,
and am hotly bred; not by the unregenerate waste
of savage rivers. Harsh and fecund water
grows out of my heart. The restless Nile
shaped in minute lizard scales, each curve
and wrinkled face of water, this poisonous Nile
was said to engender serpents. You might distrust me,
might be afraid; you clinging fog, you coward
to eat the body out and leave
my sound flesh corroded. Bloodless, too empty
to occupy me, too evasive
to fill my hands; what are you
that you mean more to the blood within my hands
than their own bubbling blood; that you take the place
in my brain, of my brain? What are you
to involve desire; so breakable, pointless,
no more meaningful than difficult laughter.
I have resented you; a parasite worm
drinking the female. I have needed you
because you were clever, or I liked your hair,
and you were kind. How shall I murder you
for your kindness? I am not capable
for your exquisite indirections; your tenderness
I find too thin. You needed me
to divert your mind, to divert
the thin self-consciousness seeping in your body
into a fictive intensity. You have burned into color
the tissue in me, and burned your fingers
at the surprising conflagration. This is so easily said,
that I love you; but I will not love you
when there is nothing left of me; a gutted carcass

for wind to whistle in; the shell of humanity
outlined in ashes. When I have no more strength
you might be afraid of me.

To a Fish.

When I was seven years old I had
A dream, a dream! I wandered in the sun,
And everywhere the yellow earth was hard
And the grass bent down.
Sun was dry and yellow in the grass-blade
And the skin of earth glistened with sun.

Having put my hand upon the earth
I felt sun filling the palm of my hand;
Having kissed the dust with my mouth
I lay and let the kissing sun be kind;
Having eaten yellow light and warmth
I made the sun my everlasting friend.

Here in my temples and my wrists I wear
Veins of sunlight underneath the skin;
And I keep surly sunlight in my hair
And the sun sits where my thoughts begin;
Forgive me then the fire you cannot bear;
How should I help it, being made of sun?

Waltzing Mouse.

Impaled I was when I was born,
caught upon time's nether horn,
murdered through and through with birth,
cankered with corrupted earth,
knives set round about my feet,
wormwood given me to eat.

Every hour of sunlight I
watch my body partly die;
every time the moon goes over
cuts my body from its lover.

Mind they gave me that I make
bitter as a broken snake;
heart they gave me to contrive
I should bleed for all alive,
knowing each man's private pain
as a worm within my brain,
lying nightly down alone
to break my kissing lips on stone.

Slick between my fingers run
sands of time from sun to sun,
grains of hunger and delight,
diapered with dark and bright;
kisses and confusions pass
dribbling through the fat hourglass.

I could never put my arm
round my love to keep him warm
but my clasp must be unloosed

and my love by time seduced.
I shall never keep my grief
longer than a maple leaf
flies between the air and ground;
time shall make my spirit sound
and steal from me before I die
the agony I know is I.

Never joy and never sorrow
but they shall be soiled tomorrow,
but they shall be wine and wheaten
bread that time has drunk and eaten.
Starry pleasures I would cherish
inchmeal dwindle, dim, and perish;
hatred that would keep me clever
shrivels, like a salty river
slaughtered by corroding sand;
treasures cupped within my hand
time has nibbled from my palm;
all my storms decline to calm
dead and level in a breast
time has gelded of unrest,
and I skip from minute to minute
each one with me buried in it,
and I see my bridges burn
gold behind me as I turn,
and I see my painful track
blotted out behind my back
till I die as I was born,
slain upon time's other horn.

Tortoise.

I wear a shell upon myself
To keep myself from coming through;
To make a small and final gulf
Between my living face and you.

And you have had me as you would,
For taste and touch; you have not known
My spirit in the secret blood
Running a trickle through a bone.

Tangible fingers of you find
Sufficient answer, while I take
Evasive refuge in the mind
Or sanctuary in mistake.

I slip the net of you for me
With salvage separate and whole;
A spindrift of an entity
And one cold fraction of my soul,

As fabric out of wind and light
You do not want or would despise,
Ecstatic, innocent, and slight;
And am enabled to devise

Of such imponderable stuff
Armor enclosing silver space

Where I withdraw into the tough
Frustration of a carapace.

And Pilate Said.

(For Basil Rathbone)

Pontius Pilate, remembered as a Roman
leaving the shape of a cold hawk on the mind,
is perished. There is no more to find
now than greyness, in starlight
the webby feathers of hawks on chilly wind,
cold crying out of a bird's throat, thin as air, and no man
but is supplanted by nebulous angels. Nor sunlight
cutting and white comes sharp against the dead,
but the throat perishes and the tongue is broken
beyond a whisper forever; nor overtaken
by the slight wings of anything said
in voices, remainders of ashes are shaken
along a thin watery running twilight.

Once in a doubtful year between age and youth
the hawk cried questions in barbarian
lands of confusion, and his answers ran
thick painted noise out of a barbarous mouth,
whereat the hawk disdainingly: What is truth?
clamored like starfire from the leaning sky
all shrill with only one sweet murderous cry

tearing fine air;
cry like a talon, like a question, tear
the lying heart, tear loving, tear the heart,
let bravery out, let the clear spirit go fly,
tear nestling bones from anchorage, tear apart
the tender lips, the soft flesh of a lie.

Apology for Liberals.

Whether the greater or the little death
be more to fear; whether the ominous voice
and iron murder of bombs, the broken forehead,
the limbs left bloody in broken stone, the murder,
the sudden bursting of the flesh asunder
in a red scream, whether the last destruction
be the last degradation; or whether the spirit
stiff and encrusted with lying, the flinching eyes
poor shifts of daily death, the pride
resolved in filth, be a worse worm to bear
than any gnawing the eyeholes of a skull
lost on the battlefield; pity the little death,
fighters pity cowards.

The fear prevails the shame prevails the terror
weakens the cords of the knees and loosens the tongue
and we are wounded by any whisper of music
and we endure barely the weight of a word
and we turn aside. O then be merciful

to the soft hands the delicate torn fingernails
unarmored eyes. Forgive these cowards
for the weak dream; forgive them tremulous,
forgive them broken. Let them come upon
some easy corner of death. Pity these cowards,
you struck into fragments by the bombs, you perishing
under a scream of air and falling steel,
you fighters you fallen in battle.

End of a Revolutionary.

When I am born again
I shall come like the grass-blade;
I shall be fertile and small
As the seed of grasses.
Rain shall breed me;
Earth shall bear me;
I shall smell of the sun
Over green fields.

Eyeless under earth
Worms gnaw the rootstock;
The strength of birdwing
Grows out of my seed;
Out of my leaf and my stem
I nourish warm cattle,
And I scatter pollen
For the bees to make bread.

When I am come again
I shall be clean
Of the taint of sorrow;
I shall grow lightly
Without any pain;
All that was weariness
Is less than the shadow
When the clouds pass.

I shall come whispering
Together, and breathing
Together, and wordless
Speaking of peace,
And die in winter
And rise in summer
And conquer the earth
In the shape of grass.

An Absolution.

Let the red image of my agony
Move you no more than to a cool regret
For inconsiderable sorrow. Let
The troubled fires of my body be

A thin light in an interstellar cave
Beyond the savage suns; permit your ear
In the harsh wailing of my soul to hear

The shallow music of a little wave.

I will not have you tainted by my pain;
I am scarred and sculptured to a hollow mask
Of vivid torture, yet I am not slain
By sharp contrivances of your disdain;
And for your gentle silence I shall ask
My bitter lunar love to leave you sane.

Dirge for the Living.

Out of our cave;
the earth a wall, the sky a wall, the ocean
a subtle prison and the nostril cave
whereby the life fights outward is a betrayal
letting life in again. Perceive
how we are compassed on all sides; in agony
when sucking at freedom, at burning emptiness
out of space past all time and beyond the world
we breathe in air. Cease air. Deliver us
out of the hand of pain. Deliver us
out of the metal, out of the jaws of rock,
the tangled insult of earth. Set us free
when distant towers are a wound and the sky clamps down
over grey naked and quivering spirit in the brain;
the sky is too great a burden, the lips of water
touching our lips devour. Set us free
from eyes letting worlds in and the ears perceiving

the brutal rape of sound; deliver us
from touch and taste; too near
the clamp of matter rounds us in the skull.

Sever the bone annihilate the sinew
stop up the nostril choke the mouth and let us
drift out of matter on wings, and let this bird,
this breath, this little air, go loose upon air,
an eddy of wind, a swirl among the stars;
and let us come to nothing.

Skeleton.

Beauty came to me in the shape of a wolf
And stared at me with yellow eyes of a wolf
Desiring the good red heart to gnaw upon,
Coveting the heartstrings;

Beauty came to me in the likeness of a wolf
Saying: I will be fed with the bones of your hands
And the cords of your throat that ripple up and down
Playing at music;

Saying: I will devour the knowledge in your eyes
And the love on your lips shall fill my belly; saying:
Give me your heart and body to feed upon
For I am lean;

Now the light wind lives whistling in my shell
In the heart's place and singing in the skull;
Beauty the wolf has eaten out my soul
And left me empty.

[The end of *Letter to a Comrade* by Joy Davidman]