

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

NEW HAVEN  
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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

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## ***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]