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The Poetry of T. S. Eliot.

To Jean Verdenal 1889-1915

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Gerontion

Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.
My house is a decayed house,
And the jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.
The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;
Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.

I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign":
 The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
 Swaddled with darkness. In the juvenescence of the year
 Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,
 To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
 Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
 With caressing hands, at Limoges
 Who walked all night in the next room;
 By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
 By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
 Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp
 Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door. Vacant shuttles
 Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
 An old man in a draughty house
 Under a windy knob.

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
 History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
 And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
 Guides us by vanities. Think now
 She gives when our attention is distracted
 And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
 That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
 What's not believed in, or if still believed,



In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
 Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
 Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think
 Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
 Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
 Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
 These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last
 We have not reached conclusion, when I
 Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last
 I have not made this show purposelessly
 And it is not by any concitation
 Of the backward devils.
 I would meet you upon this honestly.
 I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
 I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
 Since what is kept must be adulterated?
 I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
 How should I use it for your closer contact?

These with a thousand small deliberations
 Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
 Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
 With pungent sauces, multiply variety

In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,
 Suspend its operations, will the weevil
 Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
 Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
 In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
 Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn,
 White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
 And an old man driven by the Trades
 To a sleepy corner.

Tenants of the house,
 Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.



*Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein
 with a Cigar*

Tra-la-la-la-la-la-laire—nil nisi divinum stabile
 est; caetera fumus—the gondola stopped, the old
 palace was there, how charming its grey and pink—
 goats and monkeys, with such hair too!—so the
 countess passed on until she came through the
 little park, where Niobe presented her with a
 cabinet, and so departed.

Burbank crossed a little bridge
 Descending at a small hotel;
 Princess Volupine arrived,
 They were together, and he fell.

Defunctive music under sea
 Passed seaward with the passing bell
 Slowly: the God Hercules
 Had left him, that had loved him well.

The horses, under the axletree
 Beat up the dawn from Istria
 With even feet. Her shuttered barge

Burned on the water all the day.

But this or such was Bleistein's way:
A saggy bending of the knees
And elbows, with the palms turned out,
Chicago Semite Viennese.

A lustreless protrusive eye
Stares from the protozoic slime
At a perspective of Canaletto.
The smoky candle end of time

Declines. On the Rialto once.
The rats are underneath the piles.
The jew is underneath the lot.
Money in furs. The boatman smiles,

Princess Volupine extends
A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand
To climb the waterstair. Lights, lights,
She entertains Sir Ferdinand

Klein. Who clipped the lion's wings
And flea'd his rump and pared his claws?
Thought Burbank, meditating on
Time's ruins, and the seven laws.



Sweeney Erect

And the trees about me,
Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks
Groan with continual surges; and behind me
Make all a desolation. Look, look, wenches!

Paint me a cavernous waste shore
Cast in the unstilted Cyclades,
Paint me the bold anfractuious rocks
Faced by the snarled and yelping seas.

Display me Aeolus above
Reviewing the insurgent gales
Which tangle Ariadne's hair
And swell with haste the perjured sails.

Morning stirs the feet and hands
(Nausicaa and Polypheme),
Gesture of orang-outang
Rises from the sheets in steam.

This withered root of knots of hair
 Slitted below and gashed with eyes,
 This oval O cropped out with teeth:
 The sickle motion from the thighs

Jackknives upward at the knees
 Then straightens out from heel to hip
 Pushing the framework of the bed
 And clawing at the pillow slip.

Sweeney addressed full length to shave
 Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base,
 Knows the female temperament
 And wipes the suds around his face.

(The lengthened shadow of a man
 Is history, said Emerson
 Who had not seen the silhouette
 Of Sweeney straddled in the sun).

Tests the razor on his leg
 Waiting until the shriek subsides.
 The epileptic on the bed
 Curves backward, clutching at her sides.

The ladies of the corridor



Find themselves involved, disgraced,
 Call witness to their principles
 And deprecate the lack of taste

Observing that hysteria
 Might easily be misunderstood;
 Mrs. Turner intimates
 It does the house no sort of good.

But Doris, towelled from the bath,
 Enters padding on broad feet,
 Bringing sal volatile
 And a glass of brandy neat.

A Cooking Egg.

En l'an trentiesme de mon aage
 Que toutes mes hontes j'ay beucs ...

Pipit sate upright in her chair
 Some distance from where I was sitting;
 Views of the Oxford Colleges
 Lay on the table, with the knitting.

Daguerreotypes and silhouettes,
 Her grandfather and great great aunts,
 Supported on the mantelpiece
 An Invitation to the Dance.

.

I shall not want Honour in Heaven
 For I shall meet Sir Philip Sidney
 And have talk with Coriolanus
 And other heroes of that kidney.

I shall not want Capital in Heaven
 For I shall meet Sir Alfred Mond:
 We two shall lie together, lapt
 In a five per cent Exchequer Bond.



I shall not want Society in Heaven,
 Lucretia Borgia shall be my Bride;
 Her anecdotes will be more amusing
 Than Pipit's experience could provide.

I shall not want Pipit in Heaven:
 Madame Blavatsky will instruct me
 In the Seven Sacred Trances;
 Piccarda de Donati will conduct me ...

.

But where is the penny world I bought
 To eat with Pipit behind the screen?
 The red-eyed scavengers are creeping
 From Kentish Town and Golder's Green;

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.
 Over buttered scones and crumpets
 Weeping, weeping multitudes
 Droop in a hundred A.B.C.'s



Le Directeur.

Malheur à la malheureuse Tamise!
 Tamisel Qui coule si pres du Spectateur.
 Le directeur
 Conservateur
 Du Spectateur
 Empeste la brise.
 Les actionnaires
 Réactionnaires
 Du Spectateur
 Conservateur
 Bras dessus bras dessous
 Font des tours
 A pas de loup.
 Dans un égout
 Une petite fille
 En guenilles
 Camarde
 Regarde
 Le directeur
 Du Spectateur
 Conservateur
 Et crève d'amour.

Mélange adultère de tout.

En Amerique, professeur;
 En Angleterre, journaliste;
 C'est à grands pas et en sueur
 Que vous suivrez à peine ma piste.
 En Yorkshire, conferencier;
 A Londres, un peu banquier,
 Vous me paierez bien la tête.
 C'est à Paris que je me coiffe
 Casque noir de jemenfoutiste.
 En Allemagne, philosophe
 Surexcité par Emporheben
 Au grand air de Bergsteigleben;
 J'erre toujours de-ci de-là
 A divers coups de tra la la
 De Damas jusqu'à Omaha.
 Je celebrai mon jour de fête
 Dans une oasis d'Afrique
 Vêtu d'une peau de girafe.

 On montrera mon cénotaphe
 Aux côtes brûlantes de Mozambique.



Lune de Miel.

Ils ont vu les Pays-Bas, ils rentrent à Terre Haute;
 Mais une nuit d'été, les voici à Ravenne,
 A l'sur le dos écartant les genoux
 De quatre jambes molles tout gonflées de morsures.
 On relève le drap pour mieux égratigner.
 Moins d'une lieue d'ici est Saint Apollinaire
 In Classe, basilique connue des amateurs
 De chapitiaux d'acanthé que touraioie le vent.

Ils vont prendre le train de huit heures
 Prolonger leurs misères de Padoue à Milan
 Ou se trouvent le Cène, et un restaurant pas cher.
 Lui pense aux pourboires, et redige son bilan.
 Ils auront vu la Suisse et traversé la France.
 Et Saint Apollinaire, raide et ascétique,
 Vieille usine désaffectée de Dieu, tient encore
 Dans ses pierres écroulantes la forme précise de Byzance.

The Hippopotamus.

Similiter et omnes revereantur Diaconos, ut
 mandatum Jesu Christi; et Episcopum, ut Jesum
 Christum, existentem filium Patris; Presbyteros
 autem, ut concilium Dei et conjunctionem
 Apostolorum. Sine his Ecclesia non vocatur; de
 quibus suadeo vos sic habeo.

S. IGNATII AD TRALLIANOS.

And when this epistle is read among you, cause
 that it be read also in the church of the
 Laodiceans.

The broad-backed hippopotamus
 Rests on his belly in the mud;
 Although he seems so firm to us
 He is merely flesh and blood.

Flesh-and-blood is weak and frail,
 Susceptible to nervous shock;

While the True Church can never fail
For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's feeble steps may err
In compassing material ends,
While the True Church need never stir
To gather in its dividends.

The 'potamus can never reach
The mango on the mango-tree;
But fruits of pomegranate and peach
Refresh the Church from over sea.

At mating time the hippo's voice
Betrays inliexions hoarse and odd,
But every week we hear rejoice
The Church, at being one with God.

The hippopotamus's day
Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;
God works in a mysterious way-
The Church can sleep and feed at once.

I saw the 'potamus take wing
Ascending from the damp savannas,
And quiring angels round him sing



The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean
And him shall heavenly arms enfold,
Among the saints he shall be seen
Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow,
By all the martyr'd virgins kiss,
While the True Church remains below
Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.

Dans le Restaurant

Le garçon délabré qui n'a rien à faire
 Que de se gratter les doigts et se pencher sur mon épaule:
 “Dans mon pays il fera temps pluvieux,
 Du vent, du grand soleil, et de la pluie;
 C'est ce qu'on appelle le jour de lessive des gueux.”
 (Bavard, baveux, à la croupe arrondie,
 Je te prie, au moins, ne bave pas dans la soupe).
 “Les saules trempés, et des bourgeons sur les ronces—
 C'est là, dans une averse, qu'on s'abrite.
 J'avais septtans, elle était plus petite.
 Elle était toute mouillée, je lui ai donné des primavères.”
 Les tâches de son gilet montent au chiffre de trente-huit.
 “Je la chatouillais, pour la faire rire.
 J'éprouvais un instant de puissance et de délire.

Mais alors, vieux lubrique, a cet âge ...
 “Monsieur, le fait est dur.
 Il est venu, nous peloter, un gros chien;
 Moi j'avais peur, je l'ai quittée à mi-chemin.
 C'est dommage.”

Mais alors, tu as ton vautour!



Va t'en te décrotter les rides du visage;
 Tiens, ma fourchette, dégrasse-toi le crâne.
 De quel droit payes-tu des expériences comme moi?
 Tiens, voilà dix sous, pour la salle-de-bains.

Phlébas, le Phénicien, pendant quinze jours noyé,
 Oubliait les cris des mouettes et la houle de Cornouaille,
 Et les profits et les pertes, et la cargaison d'étain:
 Un courant de sous-mer l'emporta très loin,
 Le repassant aux étapes de sa vie antérieure.
 Figurez-vous donc, c'était un sort pénible;
 Cependant, ce fut jadis un bel homme, de haute taille.

Whispers of Immortality

Webster was much possessed by death
 And saw the skull beneath the skin;
 And breastless creatures under ground
 Leaned backward with a lipless grin.

Daffodil bulbs instead of balls
 Stared from the sockets of the eyes!
 He knew that thought clings round dead limbs
 Tightening its lusts and luxuries.

Donne, I suppose, was such another
 Who found no substitute for sense;
 To seize and clutch and penetrate,
 Expert beyond experience,

He knew the anguish of the marrow
 The ague of the skeleton;
 No contact possible to flesh
 Allayed the fever of the bone.

.
 Grishkin is nice: her
 Russian eye is underlined for emphasis;



Uncorseted, her friendly bust
 Gives promise of pneumatic bliss.

The couched Brazilian jaguar
 Compels the scampering marmoset
 With subtle effluence of cat;
 Grishkin has a maisonette;

The sleek Brazilian jaguar
 Does not in its arboreal gloom
 Distil so rank a feline smell
 As Grishkin in a drawing-room.

And even the Abstract Entities
 Circumambulate her charm;
 But our lot crawls between dry ribs
 To keep our metaphysics warm.

Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service

Look, look, master, here comes two religions
caterpillars.

The Jew of Malta.

Polyphiloprogenitive
The sapient sutlers of the Lord
Drift across the window-panes.
In the beginning was the Word.

In the beginning was the Word.
Superfetation of [Greek text inserted here],
And at the mensual turn of time
Produced enervate Origen.

A painter of the Umbrian school
Designed upon a gesso ground
The nimbus of the Baptized God.
The wilderness is cracked and browned

But through the water pale and thin
Still shine the unoffending feet



And there above the painter set
The Father and the Paraclete.

.
The sable presbyters approach
The avenue of penitence;
The young are red and pustular
Clutching piaculative pence.

Under the penitential gates
Sustained by staring Seraphim
Where the souls of the devout
Burn invisible and dim.

Along the garden-wall the bees
With hairy bellies pass between
The staminate and pistilate,
Blest office of the epicene.

Sweeney shifts from ham to ham
Stirring the water in his bath.
The masters of the subtle schools
Are controversial, polymath.

—

Sweeney Among the Nightingales.

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees
 Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
 The zebra stripes along his jaw
 Swelling to maculate giraffe.

The circles of the stormy moon
 Slide westward toward the River Plate,
 Death and the Raven drift above
 And Sweeney guards the horned gate.

Gloomy Orion and the Dog
 Are veiled; and hushed the shrunken seas;
 The person in the Spanish cape
 Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees

Slips and pulls the table cloth
 Overturns a coffee-cup,
 Reorganized upon the floor
 She yawns and draws a stocking up;

The silent man in mocha brown
 Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes;
 The waiter brings in oranges



Bananas figs and hothouse grapes;

The silent vertebrate in brown
 Contracts and concentrates, withdraws;
 Rachel née Rabinovitch
 Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;

She and the lady in the cape
 Are suspect, thought to be in league;
 Therefore the man with heavy eyes
 Declines the gambit, shows fatigue,

Leaves the room and reappears
 Outside the window, leaning in,
 Branches of wisteria
 Circumscribe a golden grin;

The host with someone indistinct
 Converses at the door apart,
 The nightingales are singing near
 The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

And sang within the bloody wood
 When Agamemnon cried aloud,
 And let their liquid droppings fall
 To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
 A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
 Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
 Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
 Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
 Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,
 When the evening is spread out against the sky
 Like a patient etherized upon a table;
 Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
 The muttering retreats
 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
 And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
 Streets that follow like a tedious argument
 Of insidious intent
 To lead you to an overwhelming question....
 Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
 Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go



Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
 The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
 Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
 Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
 And seeing that it was a soft October night,
 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
 For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
 Rubbing its back upon the window panes;
 There will be time, there will be time
 To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet
 There will be time to murder and create,
 And time for all the works and days of hands
 That lift and drop a question on your plate;
 Time for you and time for me,
 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
 And for a hundred visions and revisions,
 Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
 Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
 (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
 (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
 Do I dare
 Disturb the universe?
 In a minute there is time
 For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall
 Beneath the music from a farther room.
 So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
 The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
 And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
 When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
 Then how should I begin



To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
 And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
 Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
 (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
 Is it perfume from a dress
 That makes me so digress?
 Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
 And should I then presume?
 And how should I begin?

.
 Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
 And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
 Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

.
 And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
 Smoothed by long fingers,
 Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers.
 Stretched on on the floor, here beside you and me.
 Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
 But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought
 in upon a platter,
 I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
 And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
 Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
 Would it have been worth while,
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball
 To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
 To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
 Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
 If one, settling a pillow by her head,
 Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
 That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
 Would it have been worth while,
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail
 along the
 floor—



And this, and so much more?—
 It is impossible to say just what I mean!
 But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a
 screen:
 Would it have been worth while
 If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
 And turning toward the window, should say:
 "That is not it at all,
 That is not what I meant, at all."

 No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do
 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
 Deferential, glad to be of use,
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
 Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
 I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
 I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
 I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
 When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.



Portrait of a Lady

Thou hast committed—
 Fornication: but that was in another country
 And besides, the wench is dead.

—The Jew of Malta.

1.

Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon
 You have the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do—
 With “I have saved this afternoon for you”;
 And four wax candles in the darkened room,
 Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,
 An atmosphere of Juliet’s tomb
 Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.
 We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole
 Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and finger-tips.
 “So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul
 Should be resurrected only among friends
 Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom
 That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room.”
 —And so the conversation slips

Among velleities and carefully caught regrets
 Through attenuated tones of violins
 Mingled with remote cornets
 And begins.

“You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends,
 And how, how rare and strange it is, to find
 In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends,
 (For indeed I do not love it ... you knew? you are not blind!
 How keen you are!)
 To find a friend who has these qualities,
 Who has, and gives
 Those qualities upon which friendship lives.
 How much it means that I say this to you—
 Without these friendships—life, what cauchemar!”
 Among the windings of the violins
 And the ariettes
 Of cracked cornets
 Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins
 Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,
 Capricious monotone
 That is at least one definite “false note.”
 —Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,
 Admire the monuments
 Discuss the late events,
 Correct our watches by the public clocks.



Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks.

2.

Now that lilacs are in bloom
 She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
 And twists one in her fingers while she talks.
 “Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
 What life is, you should hold it in your hands”;
 (Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
 “You let it flow from you, you let it flow,
 And youth is cruel, and has no remorse
 And smiles at situations which it cannot see.”
 I smile, of course,
 And go on drinking tea.
 “Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall
 My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,
 I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world
 To be wonderful and youthful, after all.”

The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune
 Of a broken violin on an August afternoon:
 “I am always sure that you understand
 My feelings, always sure that you feel,
 Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand.

You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel.
 You will go on, and when you have prevailed
 You can say: at this point many a one has failed.

But what have I, but what have I, my friend,
 To give you, what can you receive from me?
 Only the friendship and the sympathy
 Of one about to reach her journey's end.

I shall sit here, serving tea to friends...."

I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends
 For what she has said to me?
 You will see me any morning in the park
 Reading the comics and the sporting page.
 Particularly I remark An English countess goes upon the stage.
 A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
 Another bank defaulter has confessed.
 I keep my countenance, I remain self-possessed
 Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired
 Reiterates some worn-out common song
 With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
 Recalling things that other people have desired.
 Are these ideas right or wrong?

3.



The October night comes down; returning as before
 Except for a slight sensation of being ill at ease
 I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door
 And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees.

"And so you are going abroad; and when do you return?
 But that's a useless question.
 You hardly know when you are coming back,
 You will find so much to learn."
 My smile falls heavily among the bric-à-brac.

"Perhaps you can write to me."
 My self-possession flares up for a second;
 This is as I had reckoned.

"I have been wondering frequently of late
 (But our beginnings never know our ends!)
 Why we have not developed into friends."
 I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark
 Suddenly, his expression in a glass.
 My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark.

"For everybody said so, all our friends,
 They all were sure our feelings would relate
 So closely! I myself can hardly understand.

We must leave it now to fate.
 You will write, at any rate.
 Perhaps it is not too late.
 I shall sit here, serving tea to friends.”

And I must borrow every changing shape
 To find expression ... dance, dance
 Like a dancing bear,
 Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.
 Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance—
 Well! and what if she should die some afternoon,
 Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose;
 Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand
 With the smoke coming down above the housetops;
 Doubtful, for quite a while
 Not knowing what to feel or if I understand
 Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon ...
 Would she not have the advantage, after all?
 This music is successful with a “dying fall”
 Now that we talk of dying—
 And should I have the right to smile?



Preludes

1.

The winter evening settles down
 With smell of steaks in passageways.
 Six o'clock.
 The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
 And now a gusty shower wraps
 The grimy scraps
 Of withered leaves about your feet
 And newspapers from vacant lots;
 The showers beat
 On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
 And at the corner of the street
 A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
 And then the lighting of the lamps.

2.

The morning comes to consciousness
 Of faint stale smells of beer
 From the sawdust-trampled street
 With all its muddy feet that press

To early coffee-stands.

With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

3.

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
You lay upon your back, and waited;
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.
And when all the world came back
And the light crept up between the shutters,
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;
Sitting along the bed's edge, where
You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands.



4.

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That fade behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

Rhapsody on a Windy Night.

Twelve o'clock.

Along the reaches of the street
 Held in a lunar synthesis,
 Whispering lunar incantations
 Dissolve the floors of memory
 And all its clear relations,
 Its divisions and precisions,
 Every street lamp that I pass
 Beats like a fatalistic drum,
 And through the spaces of the dark
 Midnight shakes the memory
 As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

Half-past one,
 The street lamp sputtered,
 The street lamp muttered,
 The street lamp said,
 "Regard that woman
 Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
 Which opens on her like a grin.
 You see the border of her dress
 Is torn and stained with sand,



And you see the corner of her eye
 Twists like a crooked pin."

The memory throws up high and dry
 A crowd of twisted things;
 A twisted branch upon the beach
 Eaten smooth, and polished
 As if the world gave up
 The secret of its skeleton,
 Stiff and white.
 A broken spring in a factory yard,
 Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
 Hard and curled and ready to snap.

Half-past two,
 The street-lamp said,
 "Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,
 Slips out its tongue
 And devours a morsel of rancid butter."
 So the hand of the child, automatic,
 Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along
 the quay.
 I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
 I have seen eyes in the street
 Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
 And a crab one afternoon in a pool,

An old crab with barnacles on his back,
Gripped the end of a stick which I held him.

Half-past three,
The lamp sputtered,
The lamp muttered in the dark.

The lamp hummed:
“Regard the moon,
La lune ne garde aucune rancune,
She winks a feeble eye,
She smiles into corners.
She smooths the hair of the grass.
The moon has lost her memory.
A washed-out smallpox cracks her face,
Her hand twists a paper rose,
That smells of dust and old Cologne,
She is alone With all the old nocturnal smells
That cross and cross across her brain.
The reminiscence comes
Of sunless dry geraniums
And dust in crevices,
Smells of chestnuts in the streets
And female smells in shuttered rooms
And cigarettes in corridors
And cocktail smells in bars.”



The lamp said,
“Four o’clock,
Here is the number on the door.
Memory!
You have the key,
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair,
Mount.
The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life.”

The last twist of the knife.



Morning at the Window.

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens,
 And along the trampled edges of the street
 I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids
 Sprouting despondently at area gates.
 The brown waves of fog toss up to me
 Twisted faces from the bottom of the street,
 And tear from a passer-by with muddy skirts
 An aimless smile that hovers in the air
 And vanishes along the level of the roofs.

The Boston Evening Transcript.

The readers of the Boston Evening Transcript
 Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.
 When evening quickens faintly in the street,
 Wakening the appetites of life in some
 And to others bringing the Boston Evening Transcript,
 I mount the steps and ring the bell, turning
 Wearily, as one would turn to nod good-bye to Rochefoucauld,
 If the street were time and he at the end of the street,
 And I say, "Cousin Harriet, here is the Boston Evening Tran-
 script."

Aunt Helen.

Miss Helen Slingsby was my maiden aunt,
 And lived in a small house near a fashionable square
 Cared for by servants to the number of four.
 Now when she died there was silence in heaven
 And silence at her end of the street.
 The shutters were drawn and the undertaker wiped his feet—
 He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before.
 The dogs were handsomely provided for,
 But shortly afterwards the parrot died too.
 The Dresden clock continued ticking on the mantelpiece,
 And the footman sat upon the dining-table
 Holding the second housemaid on his knees—
 Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived.

*Cousin Nancy.*

Miss Nancy Ellicott Strode across the hills and broke them,
 Rode across the hills and broke them—
 The barren New England hills—
 Riding to hounds
 Over the cow-pasture.

Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked
 And danced all the modern dances;
 And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,
 But they knew that it was modern.

Upon the glazen shelves kept watch
 Matthew and Waldo, guardians of the faith,
 The army of unalterable law.



Mr. Apollinax.

When Mr. Apollinax visited the United States
 His laughter tinkled among the teacups.
 I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch-trees,
 And of Priapus in the shrubbery
 Gaping at the lady in the swing.
 In the palace of Mrs. Phlaccus, at Professor Channing-
 Cheetah's
 He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.
 Otis laughter was submarine and profound
 Like the old man of the sea's
 Hidden under coral islands
 Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the
 green silence,
 Dropping from fingers of surf.
 I looked for the head of Mr. Apollinax rolling under a chair
 Or grinning over a screen
 With seaweed in its hair.
 I heard the beat of centaur's hoofs over the hard turf
 As his dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon.
 "He is a charming man"—"But after all what did he mean?"—
 "His pointed ears ... He must be unbalanced,"—
 "There was something he said that I might have challenged."
 Of dowager Mrs. Phlaccus, and Professor and Mrs. Cheetah
 I remember a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon.

Hysteria.

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her
 laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were
 only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I
 was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary
 recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her
 throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. An
 elderly waiter with trembling hands was hurriedly
 spreading a pink and white checked cloth over the rusty
 green iron table, saying: "If the lady and gentleman
 wish to take their tea in the garden, if the lady and
 gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden ..." I
 decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be
 stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might
 be collected, and I concentrated my attention with
 careful subtlety to this end.

Conversation Galante.

I observe: "Our sentimental friend the moon!
 Or possibly (fantastic, I confess)
 It may be Prester John's balloon
 Or an old battered lantern hung aloft
 To light poor travellers to their distress."
 She then: "How you digress!"

And I then: "Some one frames upon the keys
 That exquisite nocturne, with which we explain
 The night and moonshine; music which we seize
 To body forth our vacuity."
 She then: "Does this refer to me?"
 "Oh no, it is I who am inane."

"You, madam, are the eternal humorist,
 The eternal enemy of the absolute,
 Giving our vagrant moods the slightest twist!
 With your aid indifferent and imperious
 At a stroke our mad poetics to confute—"
 And—"Are we then so serious?"

*La Figlia Che Piange.*

O quam te memorem Virgo ...

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—
 Lean on a garden urn—
 Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—
 Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—
 Fling them to the ground and turn
 With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:
 But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
 So I would have had her stand and grieve,
 So he would have left
 As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
 As the mind deserts the body it has used.
 I should find
 Some way incomparably light and deft,
 Some way we both should understand,
 Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather

Compelled my imagination many days,
Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together!
I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze
The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.











































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































