The complete poems of R. P. Blackmur

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Thesis

THE COMPLETE POEMS OF R. P. BLACKMUR

by

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B.A., Brandeis University, 2009

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2014
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How many times have you not seen an extraordinarily able work of scholarship vitiated because the scholar did not dare transform his facts about the work so as to affect our sense of what we get from the work: the very sense of the work at a given moment. A vast amount of able scholarship is a vast understatement made not as a rhetorical device or a dramatic gesture but as a flat and aimless understatement which is the effect of training in caution, reserve and the sin of over-scrupulosity in every matter not directly warranted by fact. It is mere facts that make mere scholarship; it is mere facts about the work that fail to tell us what the work is about.

"The Lion and the Honeycomb"
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the guidance and support of my advisors Christopher Ricks and Archie Burnett, co-directors of the Editorial Institute at Boston University. I also wish to express my gratitude to Ben Mazer, for advice, encouragement, and access to rare source material.

The help of archivists and librarians has been essential in assembling this edition. Many thanks are due to the Rockefeller Archive Center in Tarrytown, New York, and in particular to Mary Ann Quinn. I am also grateful to the staff of Houghton Library, Harvard University, and to Tina Mullins of Mugar Memorial Library.
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ABSTRACT

This critical edition collects all of R. P. Blackmur’s published poems for the first time, gives authoritative texts, and represents the first authoritative critical edition of R. P. Blackmur’s poetry. The edition records all variants from Blackmur’s published poems in an Apparatus Criticus, and includes the most comprehensive bibliography of Blackmur’s publications made to date, containing vastly more entries than any previous bibliography. A critical commentary discusses at length the relationship between Blackmur’s criticism and his poetry, and places his poetry within the context of the critical dialogue of the time in which he lived and worked.
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List of Abbreviations

A = Anathema: An Unorthodox Quarterly


HH = Hound & Horn

KR = Kenyon Review


P = *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*


PR = *Partisan Review*

RF papers = RG 1.1, Series 200R, Box 243, 407, 358. Rockefeller
Foundation records. Rockefeller Archive Center. Tarrytown, NY

SoR = *The Southern Review*


tM = *The Magazine: A Journal of Contemporary Writing*

VQR = *Virginia Quarterly Review*

Y = *R. P. Blackmur Reads from his Own Works*. The Yale Series of Recorded Poets.
Solicitude and Critique
MR. ROBERT ARCHAMBEAU has characterized his own trajectory—from a poet-critic who writes mostly poetry, to a poet-critic who writes mostly criticism—as the "most boring" transition that a man of letters can make.\(^1\) Though R. P. Blackmur did not leave any significant statement in print about his own movement through these rôles, and did not refer to himself as a "poet-critic" at all, he did comment at length on a doubling that suggests plentiful boredom to anyone looking for it: the scholar-critic. It is 1950, and the essay is "The Lion and the Honeycomb".

Perhaps I should begin by the assertion that scholarship and criticism make, when allied, a single field because there is necessarily a mutual relationship between them, and that either branch of the enterprise is in sorry condition when the relevant form of the other is not present. The relation, and the difference that is in relation, may be expressed grammatically, like so much else in the affairs of the mind. Criticism draws \textit{from} literature that which it
signifies or which is useful. Scholarship is about literature, describes it, surrounds it, identifies its content, and supplies what is lacking because of the movement of time or the shift in the conventions of the literary mind. Criticism is use; scholarship is the means of use. Criticism accords to the act of imitation or creation. Scholarship accords to the act of description or the refreshment of memory or history. Criticism is within, scholarship without, the work. Criticism deals with the experience of the ideas (or feelings, or what not) in the work. Scholarship deals with the ideas (or feelings, or what not), otherwise derived, that may or may not be in the work. Scholarship and criticism edge into each other; in the limbo between is that extraordinarily complicated thing called full appreciation short of judgment.²

Boredom does not arise here, perhaps because Blackmur felt validated by the success of the "new criticism", but more likely because he raised literary rôle-playing as an aesthetic issue. Blackmur sings the qualities of his perfect scholar-critic while looking into the modes of mind laid out in Plato's Phaedrus—the poetic, the dialectical, and the rhetorical—and it should be impossible to tell which case serves as the descriptive example for the other. But Blackmur also lamented specialized literary roles as symptoms of a broken intellectual world: "culture has become fragmentary, belief has become beliefs, as interests have become specialized and communities massive," he notices.³ Blackmur depletes this fragmentation, and his late essays always and everywhere glimpse its results: in the
pernicious division of interests among what he calls a new "intellectual proletarait", in a falling away of literature from literature, and in a cancer of rhetorical thinking among the "new critics" (a term always used with quotation marks, and never capitalized). Blackmur was fond of raising Coleridge's succinct statement on the three silent revolutions in English history: "first, when the professions fell off from the church; secondly, when literature fell off from the professions; and, thirdly, when the press fell off from literature." In 1956 he made his own cryptic addendum: "I will not say what the fourth silent revolution is," he said, "It is ours, and now going on."

Despite the waste, the alliance of criticism and scholarship that Blackmur describes supposes a unity of substance to be found beneath specializations—"a single field"—and one feels its presence in his criticism. Even in the early essays, more often devoted to close reading than social commentary, Blackmur's critique is enlivened with the sense that he catches a modifying agent while it works on the substance of poetic power; that he is able to identify the agent's movements and give them name. But Blackmur's naming always preserves something in obscurity, moving beneath his designations and giving them either substance or place: this is "the actual", or "the realm of the actual"; also the "rational imagination". While the substance or field in question persists, Blackmur's terms for describing it are only methods, something like the poets' methods that he names, and equally hinged on a reader's appreciation. Not the development of a practical methodology, but the creation of fresh experience is always at stake, and style is of the utmost importance.
"A thing expressed so as to be experienced is everywhere self-critical of its form," Blackmur says, "as without form it could not be completely experienced but only more or less sentimentally construed." When an approach is systematized it lacks the self-criticism of what Blackmur calls ignorance, and the experience of ideas becomes sentimental. Reliance on methodology is sentimental in the utmost.

Even the practice of close reading (a method sometimes considered Blackmur's great contribution and specialty as a critic) was a provisional technique for Blackmur, a convenience used principally because of the way it creates fresh experience in an audience unaccustomed to trafficking in pure insight. This view of close reading was not the result of revisionary practice during Blackmur's oracular period in the 'fifties: this is April, 1936. Blackmur has never yet worked at a university, except as a clerk at Widener library, and he is reviewing Allen Tate's *Reactionary Essays* at the urging of the undergraduate poet John Berryman, for the *Columbia Review*:

Insight is the source of craft in imagination as statistics are the source of craft in physics. If you like, an effective insight is more a technical dodge than the effective rhyme which clinches it; neither is come by offhand, though either may be sudden, and neither may be separated from the object which they bring to experience, which is the poem. Neither merely participates in the experience, they are the experience in symbolic form; and if you distinguish one you have caused the other, if obliviously, to transpire. In choosing to deal
largely with the conditioning insights rather than the perfecting technique of poetry, Mr. Tate exposes himself to two difficulties which cannot be entirely overcome. There is the difficulty about the audience. Most minds cannot accept either the familiar insights they abuse or those of an alien sensibility as fundamentally conventional in character and necessarily imaginative in application; which means they will not think of an insight in a particular instance. A poem is a particular instance. And if by chance the critic does demonstrate the conventional and imaginative aspect the audience will be convinced that you have reduced the insight to an empty formula where actually you have raised it, in the instance, to experienced form. In short, most minds are bound to use as literal forms of action or not at all whatever insights they can muster. The insuperable difficulty is that all of us employ most of our insights literally most of the time, that is without attending to them.

The second difficulty is in the critic, not the subject. The critic here happens to be Mr. Tate but might as well be Mr. Eliot or Mr. Richards. Insights are not amenable to any form but that of experience. Unable to depend upon his reader possessing the appropriate experience, and equally unable to present the whole experience in the context of his criticism, the critic is compelled to resort to the substitute or blueprint form of dogmatic statement; which is to say he is compelled to use absolute form to make a provisional statement. There is no way out. Good dogma telescopes its
material by concentrating a focus; weak dogma telescopes its material to the vanishing point, leaving only the telescope and the willed notion of vision. In order to know what dogma is good and what weak there must be somewhere a resort to fresh experience, and in the intellectual discourse which comprises the most of criticism there is no sure principle of resort. That is the advantage, which Mr. Tate seldom takes, of pinning the form of insight invariably upon the rhyme that clinches it, when the technical elucidation may be made to cast an implied light or shadow upon the insight.\textsuperscript{8}

Blackmur prods Allen Tate to use more close reading in his practice by framing the activity as a convenience. The pragmatism in this may be disconcerting if one loves Blackmur for his famous early analyses, but it stresses the provisional character of his critical statements. If one does not escape the flux except in credulous unawareness, the best to be hoped for is a convinced general audience and, at home, an ouroboros without disguise.

Another essay of the 1930s takes a similar approach to what Blackmur calls "putative statements", or axioms about the nature of reality, pithily expressed. For Blackmur, the putative statement has limitations as close reading does: it is a method like others, and reductive if treated (reductively) as a transparency.

The strength of the putative statement is only simple when thought of abstractly and as appealing to the intellect—to the putative element in
appreciation: as if we read lyric poetry solely for the schematic paraphrase we make of it in popular discussion, or as if, in contemplating war, we thought only of political causes or in terms of the quartermaster's technique alone. What we want is to see what is the source of putative strength and how deeply its appeal is asserted; and in that pursuit we shall find ourselves instantly, I think, in the realm of language itself. Words, and their intimate arrangements, must be the ultimate as well as the immediate source of every effect in the written or spoken arts. Words bring meaning to birth and themselves contained the meaning as an imminent possibility before the pangs of junction. To the individual artist the use of words is an adventure in discovery; the imagination is heuristic among the words it manipulates. The reality you labour desperately or luckily to put into your words—and you may put it in consciously like Coleridge or by instinct as in the great ballads or from piety and passion like the translators of the Bible—you will actually have found there, deeply ready and innately formed to give objective being and specific idiom to what you knew and did not know you knew. The excitement is past belief; as we know from the many myths of heavenly inspiration. And the routine of discovery is past teaching and past prediction; as we know from the vast reaches of writing, precious and viable to their authors, wholly without the conviction of being. Yet the adventure into the reality of words has a technique after the fact in the sense that we can distinguish its successful versions from those that failed, can measure
provisionally the kinds and intensities of reality secured and attempted, and can even roughly guess at the conditions of convention and belief necessary for its emergence. 

It is a fact nearly invisible to this point in the essay that what Blackmur means by the "putative intelligence" is in fact the product of genius. It takes an understanding of putative statements to so allegorize the condition, and it takes an understanding of putative statements as provisional to take them in their multiple forms with the hopes still pinned to them, finding some so mangled by circumstance that they weakly pall. And perhaps it takes an R. P. Blackmur—himself an Ishmael figure, not an Ahab, with the critical intelligence of an outside eye enriched by the occasional stream of omniscience—to countenance the tragedy of genius when it fails. This is the drama of putative statements, and it is a recurrent subject, in Blackmur's criticism as in his poems.

Since no statement could claim more light than the limits of history and personality might allow, Blackmur's critical perspective allowed him to treat misfortune as part of a statement's design, though the design was not necessarily of the author. As history shaped a writer's failings it created texture and color, and it was by regarding the abrasions as bright points that Blackmur could describe contours for the system. This sense of statements as expirations in context is part of what Blackmur means when referring to the "expense of greatness" in its own failure, and this became one of his abiding interests. In literary failure, like unhappy
marriages for Tolstoi, writers and epochs showed their difference in full flush.
Blackmur was drawn to figures whose failure was not merely incidental, but the necessary product of a type of mental activity. Failure was a trial, to which only the greatest minds could bring themselves, and endure. Such a mind in such a trial he glimpsed and sang in Henry Adams:

The greatness of the mind of Adams himself is in the imaginative reach of the effort to solve the problem of the meaning, the use, or the value of its own energy. The greatness is in the effort itself, in variety of response deliberately made to every possible level of experience. It is in the acceptance, with all piety, of ignorance as the humbled form of knowledge; in the pursuit of divers shapes of knowledge— the scientific, the religious, the political, the social and trivial—to the point where they add to ignorance, when the best response is silence itself. That is the greatness of Adams as a type of mind. As it is a condition of life to die, it is a condition of thought, in the end, to fail. Death is the expense of life and failure is the expense of greatness.10

The wry punchline to Blackmur's commentary may be seen in time-lapse slapstick across decades of dodged publishers’ queries regarding a perpetually unfinished book about Henry Adams. The book was first sponsored by a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation for the year spanning 1937 to 1938, and was not brought to a completed form until a version edited by Veronica Makowsky collected
Blackmur's drafts, notes, and essays in 1980, fifteen years after his death. Here is Blackmur in a letter to his close friend George Anthony Palmer, in September of 1939:

I feel the same urgency of making a good book—neither sloppy nor immoral—that you want to implant in me; but I confess that there some aspects beyond any ability of mine to be sure of. I feel an especial guilt whenever I confront myself with samples of Adams' style. Whatever comes out of the years I have been chewing and the months I have been writing will come this winter if I keep my health and don't rot out. But it may all be in vain. If we get into this foul war—if we breathe nothing but the foulness in the atmosphere—here will be no place or excuse for any book I can write on Henry Adams. Harcourt Brace hinted as much in a letter I got yesterday. "We don't yet know, said they, the effect of the war on publishing" I know what they don't know very well, and they need hardly have been so forward as to suggest that I didn't.11

Style, for Blackmur, was at best a confrontation: "to hold the mirror up to nature," he said, "is to confront."12 But between this insight and Blackmur's sense of the provisional nature of statements—ever redirected by the "foulness" of history—the predicament of the writer lay crossed. Statements must confront behavior, but statements are bound up with behavior and subject to radical imperfection: failure
is the expense of greatness. The tension here is secular, but it is analogous to original sin: though the predicament may be insupportable, pleading futility or "art for art's sake" could only have the aspect of escapism, and never of escape.

For Blackmur, "art for art's sake" represented a systematic poverty of confrontation. Without its critical function, art became an egotistical game, allowing monsters of behavior to manifest in the very medium that should be able to confront them. But Blackmur's quarrel with this is aesthetic and not moralizing, and his critique of the position uses playful superiority, never indignation. The adherents of "art for art" are childish, vain, and, ultimately, ridiculous: they appear in the foppish, self-satisfied Cambridge types whom Blackmur lampoons in "Thus Things Proceed..." and in the version of E. E. Cummings, described amid throngs of imitators, in "Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language". What these flocks of straw people share, for Blackmur, is not any kind of knowledge (of which their position tends to deny the existence) but a set of imitable attitudes constructed on solipsism. Blackmur takes wicked delight in catching these folk at childish voguing, where each pose denies inner mystery by wiggling eyebrows about its abstract presence. Their denial of intelligence supposes that something about art and experience is too deep to be articulated. Blackmur submits that certain individuals are simply too shallow to be articulate. The poetry they produce might have a surface like a Hudson super-six, but it is a smooth exterior masking nothing in realm of the actual, and containing only a surge of egoist fantasy. Blackmur deduced that the practice of such writers was based in a highly sentimental attitude towards personal experience: the latter
was never questioned, was considered meaningful because it was there, and had only to be expressed from the author "like a juice". This kind of activity was simple-minded and craftless, but opened itself to popularity by the sheer ease of superficial understanding.

In a sense anyone can understand Mr. Cummings and his kind by the mere assertion that he does understand. Nothing else is needed but a little natural sympathy and a certain aptness for the resumption of a childish sensibility. In much the same way we understand a stranger's grief—by setting up a private and less painful simulacrum. If we take the most sentimental and romantic writers as they come, there will always be about their works an excited freshness, the rush of sensation and intuition, all the ominous glow of immediacy. They will be eagerly at home in the mystery of life. Adroitness, expertness, readiness for any experience, will enlighten their activities even where they most miserably fail. They are all actors, ready for any part, for they put themselves, and nothing else, into every part they play. Commonly their real success will depend on the familiarity of the moments into which they sink themselves; they will depend on convention more than others, because they have nothing else to depend on.

The "simulacrum of grief" is not a shallow analogy. Earlier in his essay, Blackmur objects to Cummings' line "scythe takes crisply the whim of thy smoothness": "it
would be very difficult," Blackmur writes, "for such a crispness to associate itself with death." Cummings’ abstractions are not merely obscure and egotistical; for Blackmur they fail to compass something crucial about the nature of reality, and allow a thrilling tautology (redolent, in this case, of flowers and candy) to supplant true insight with a swoon of personal reverie. This both keeps philosophy from sullying Cummings’ poems, and allows Cummings himself to pretend that the whole work of philosophy could be given to the auratic quality of a word divorced from its history, as an insensitive person might find special novelty in the shallow perception of a stranger’s grief.

For Blackmur, Cummings’ use of language was an affront to the reality of words that approached impiety. "An author should remember, with the Indians, that the reality of a word is anterior to, and greater than, his use of it can ever be; that there is a perfection to the feelings in words to which his mind cannot hope to attain, but that his chief labour will be toward the approximation of that perfection." Cummings’ flowers and candy were obsessively personal, and condoned the kind of impoverishment that language undergoes in society—where "people are occupied mostly with communication and argument and conversation," and little happens on the level of meaning. Blackmur wanted another quality from language, so it might express concretely what Cummings only winked about to his devotees. But like the "new critics" decades later, Blackmur found that Cummings had set up a sentimental structure for the assignment of value. Cummings’ structure was only notable for erecting immediacy and freshness as dogmatic principles. The
result was good for forming a club and becoming sentimental, but not good for generating poetic knowledge. Here it is worth noting Blackmur’s paraphrase of something Leo Stein said, where if you look at the sea and are sentimental you will feel infinite, "but if you are concerned with the object experienced you may or may not feel that the sea is infinite, a much harder thing to feel, and, incidentally, a much more difficult exercise in mystical intuition." It is insight like this, though it is not his personal insight, that points to a relation between R. P. Blackmur’s criticism and his poetry.

Despite his critique of E. E. Cummings, Blackmur developed a kind of sociological sympathy for the predominance of private language in poems, and he came to see some genre of that isolation reflected in even the greatest literature of his time. At the Library of Congress in 1956, looking back on the "Anni Mirabiles" between 1921 and 1925, Blackmur calls up the "superficial character of poetry and the poet himself." The character is superficial because the knowledge is actual: again, beneath the sentimental role-playing that modernity precipitates, Blackmur spies a single field. When he criticizes the rise of a "private language", spoken mainly by the poet out of a sense of isolation, it is with a consideration of this actual knowledge, and meant to point out the environmental conditions that have molded it towards relative obscurity.

What else could the writer do but invent a vital dogma of self-sufficiency?—and I do not say he was right in doing so. Faced with the dissolution of
thought and the isolation of the artist, faced with the new industrialization of
the intellect, what else could he do but declare his independence and self-
sufficient supremacy both as intellectual and as artist? Let us admit the new
independence came partly out of the old claims for and defenses of poetry
from Aristotle through Shelley, partly from the 19th-century claims made by
Ruskin and Arnold, all of which allied art deeply to society, but partly—and
this is the biggest emotional part—from the blow of the First World War and
what seemed the alienation of the artist from a society increasingly less
aesthetically-minded—less interested in the vivid apprehension of the
individual. It is when you have lost, or think you are about to lose, the
objective recognition of your values, that you assert them most violently and
in their most extreme form—as every unrequited lover knows. You either go
into the desert, kill yourself, pull your shell over your head, or set up in a new
business: in any case, whether lover or artist, being as conspicuous as
possible about it. To be either a dandy or dirty, and especially where out of
keeping, is always a good rôle; and to be an anchorite or an oracle combines
the advantages of both. You are in any case among enemies.20

Rôles, like putative statements or close reading, are for Blackmur provisional tools
that mask abstractions of sensibility. But "sensibility" is not itself a provisional
term. It is a word Blackmur uses steadily through his career, from the earliest
reviews to the late oracular essays, to refer to something that remains about the
same: whatever works in expression, whatever is worked upon by experience. The word never turns up in the poems, and that too is legible: some provisional phrasing is suitable for both, and so turns up in both. But sensibility is vitally transmuted in poems, where it moves without prosaic surveillance. It comes across in poetry in its less lexical forms:

And what delight?—Some bleak and gallant face,
Lonely in words, but under words at home,
Might look, might almost see, a first wind-trace,
What hardness rock and flower overcome.
It is the sea face that we hidden wear
So still, rises, rejoices, and is bare.21

Lonely in words, but under words at home. Though respect is granted to the multiple interpretations available to this or any poetry, if the levels of resonance echoing here do not include the sense that this is a statement about what Blackmur calls sensibility, or the Sublime as explained by Longinus, then one will be misreading the poem and ignoring what it is about. Some like insight may be necessary for a great deal of poetry to be richly experienced, but in Blackmur’s poems a failure to notice the drama of awakening sensibility is as significant as the failure to notice that a poem is about the beloved, or the sea. Another way of saying this: the poems are so composed as to disallow the misreading, and shunt off the
uninitiated, leaving no clues. This what Blackmur might call a "technique of trouble":
a result of the artist's pride in his isolation.\textsuperscript{22}

The trouble is real, and for Blackmur's editor it is a marketing problem, at
least: any reader unwilling to read for shapes and movements of sensibility should
perhaps not read these poems, for R. P. Blackmur will abandon anyone unwilling
follow him where he means to go. This is a private poetry. Corresponding to formal
moves that transpire in an uncommon realm of experience, one finds systematic
impoverishment of the common ground that makes it utterly uninhabitable. This
mode prevents the poems from forming a club like the "anti-culture" group that
swoons in E. E. Cummings' hints of obscurity, but it ensures Blackmur's real
obscurity, and makes his poems chronically unapproachable to anybody
unequipped with climbing gear for mystical intuitions. Jordan's Delight is an island,
as Blackmur says in his commentary on the poem for the Yale Series of Recorded
poets, "mostly cliff; all the woods have long since been washed off it."\textsuperscript{23}

Given the struggle, it is better than an idle question to ask whether R. P.
Blackmur's poems truly sit in the history of poetry, and not on a beetling cliff-face of
their own. They may belong, for an example, in the "history of sensibility" to which
Blackmur relegates the poetry of Herbert Read, of which he writes

> It is an example of the sensibility recording itself in verse: nothing is added,
something is lost in the process. It is as if Mr. Read's sensibility only very
rarely belonged in poetry at all, yet labored manfully, and nobly, to get there.
We feel a full and noble pressure; a kind of magnanimity, manqué only because it is in verse. It is one of those necessary efforts beyond central ability which we would never do without, and which, having it, we will honor all the more if we distinguish it from actual achievement: for we see then that this body of a man's work *cries out* to be poems. As such, some of it will last next to verse truly alive.24

The type of reading that Blackmur is alive to, and willing to give to Herbert Read, is one that his commentators have been unprepared to give to Blackmur. Value in Blackmur's poems is terrifically problematic, but a desire to diminish the problem and call them living verse, or write about them with the assumption that they belong in the same corner of the tradition with poets like Wallace Stevens, is obviously misguided: it must wind up with lukewarm praise of a few selections that does not extend to the body of work, coupled with an admission that the poems "have not, or at least not yet, established themselves as exerting much pressure upon contemporary poetry."25 It is more honorable to consider Blackmur as a poet if one has a pattern for appreciating work that *cries out to be poems*, and the provision of such a pattern in his own criticism is telling. Blackmur was fond of literary failure from the first; from the first obsessed with the sensibility in its myriad disasters and manifestations; to the last a commentator on the "superficial character of poetry and the poet himself"; *Lonely in words, but under words at home*. Here is Blackmur on the final stanza of Henry Adams' "A Prayer to the Virgin and the Dynamo", 

a poem he carried for many years as a kind of amulet in his wallet, and in
which is present both all the architecture of the cathedral at Chartres and all
the space in the Hall of Dynamos at the Paris World’s Fair. This is, I think, one
of those poems in which the poetry ceases to matter—in which, as in Mrs.
Bradstreet, the verse does some damage to the moving thought under the
words; but there is a great struggle for the confrontation of a vision gone: the
vastation in which one still lives.

Help me to bear! not my own baby load,

But yours; who bore the failure of the light,

The strength, the knowledge and the thought of God,—

The futile folly of the Infinite.

One thinks of a Pascal of our days: *Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis* . . .

and there is regret only for the words of the last line. Under them there is a
full act of piety to the numinous power, and Jacob’s adventure is very near.26

What such a poem includes for Blackmur is both glory and vastation—and Blackmur
is likely to have known that "vastation" had two archaic meanings for devastation or
destruction, both of them sixteenth- and seventeenth-century usages, before the
word was taken up by nineteenth-century American sermoneers to mean an act of
purification by the destruction of evil. Many of the words Blackmur favors have this sort of drama in their dictionary history: it was one of the qualities of words he most valued."I rest on the dictionary," Blackmur wrote, "which like faith is the substance of things hoped for"; a reminder of the value in words that was for him greater than—and anterior to—their use. Whether the "vastation in which one still lives" includes redemption is never specified, and like the analogue to original sin in the writer's predicament, this is an instance of Blackmur's secular piety. What he might have called "black puritan" insight is steadily traced onto words, before scripture.

Adams' poem itself is acknowledged as a failure, but Blackmur reads a full act of piety beneath the words—and the piety is related to the failure. Blackmur's appreciation of the poem bears comparison to his description of E. E. Cummings: where Cummings creates hard, impenetrable surfaces in verse, Adams' stanza generates enormous extensions of significance and space, and this is partly a function of its radical imperfection. Perhaps an unusual kind of literacy is necessary to see Chartres and the Hall of Dynamos in these lines, but Blackmur reads them there, durable past the verse's collapse, in part because verse must collapse in confrontation with the divine: "Jacob's adventure is very near." Glimpsing revelation beneath the poem, Blackmur reads in it the struggle to give insight form, dramatized in the words themselves. The choice of words is regrettable, the drama of speech a tragedy, and the "futile folly of the Infinite" is both Adams' subject and his means of expression.
This is baffling to the extent that it asks readers to appreciate a quality of poetry in certain orders of frankly bad poems. Poems can be redeemed, for Blackmur, it they engage vastation, and contain a profound movement of sensibility under the words. Yet this sort of approach must open Blackmur to censure from serious critics. Donald Davie, in an essay about "R. F." Blackmur entitled "Poetry, or Poems?" is astonished by the "perversities" of Blackmur's later essays: "Mr Blackmur," Davie says, "seems to have gone off the rails." Davie suggests the derailment occurred in Blackmur's 1942 essay on Yeats' late lyrics, which Davie admits "a critic more circumspect would have disingenuously avoided." He then lifts out a section of this essay, and names it the germ of Blackmur's critical error. Blackmur has not at this point, as Davie reports, been quoting from Yeats' "Under Ben Bulben", but from "The Apparitions":

When a man grows old his joy
Grows more deep day after day,
His empty heart is full at length
But he has need of all that strength
Because of the increasing Night
That opens her mystery and fright.

*Fifteen apparitions have I seen;*

*The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*


From this, what Davie thinks Blackmur’s disaster:

Is not the precision of the poem a long way under the precision of the words? Do not the words involve their own opposites, indeed drag them into being their own opposites, not for contradiction but for development? After such queries we can return to the poem as it is, and know it all the better so, and know that we have not altered, even tentatively, anything of its actual character by playing with what is after all merely its notation. We have come nearer, rather to the cry, the gesture, the metaphor of identity, which as it invades the words, and whichever words, is the poem we want.31

And Davie’s report to the media on the railway crash:

when all is said and done, this view that in a poem, in any poem, the words are ‘merely its notation’—how can we describe it as anything but outrageous?

Some may not agree. Plenty of people are ready to believe that the soul of a poem, its true value and life, is unutterable, escapes analysis, is magic and mystery. Perhaps, in fact, there is hardly anyone who, being really honest with himself, would deny this. Yet if we feel that in the normal way we would go to almost any lengths rather than admit it, we are not thereby being inconsistent or dishonest. For we have every reason to be suspicious. Yes, we
would all agree of course that something escapes analysis, is mysterious. But where, how soon in our reflections, how near the surface of the poem, does the magic start, the mystery supervene? And nearly always one finds, when people take up this position, that they mean the magic starts from the word go. The magic and the mystery are the smoke-screen for the enemies of criticism and of poetry. They start by asking us to admit that somewhere in the poem there is a mystery; but always what they really mean is that it is a mystery all through. If it is, then all critics are parasites and charlatans. And this is always the conclusion they drive at. For it nearly always turns out that the smoke-screen is really covering the getaway of some poet or poets whose work, as their apologists know very well, won’t stand up to the critic’s scrutiny.\(^{32}\)

It is remarkable how easily this critique could fit into Blackmur's own attack on E. E. Cummings and the anti-culture group. I submit that Blackmur does not contradict himself. Davie admits that magic and mystery are among a poem’s real components; Blackmur might argue that they are at least as real as the rhyme that clinches them, and occasionally equally needful of discussion in criticism. But Blackmur would not recognize himself in Davie's critique where he is cast as the bearer of blanket mysticism that makes critics "parasites or charlatans". Blackmur places criticism near the center of his view of literature; it is even a necessary quality in art of the first order, where "to hold the mirror up to nature is to confront." Blackmur does
not, in any essay, use the word "magic" except to refer to a more or less concrete body of beliefs that are at work in the poetry of W. B. Yeats; and the quotation Davie lifts from the essay on Yeats—though the method of replacing words in the stanza with their opposites may be unconventional—has technically specific procedure behind it, and is bent on elucidating a quality of Yeats' syntax that allows the poem to change in the mind, at some remove from the words themselves as it is read intensely. Is this not a feature that Yeats' fascination with paradox, even use of refrain, insists upon? The model for the technique may be found in the poems, and the sentences immediately preceding the quotation Davie lifts are more explicit about the specificity of this application:

\begin{quote}
Could not the night diminish as well as increase; could it not, for the purposes of the achieved poem, close as well as open? One tends to let poems stay too much as they are. Do they not actually change as they are read? Do they not, as we feel them intensely, fairly press for change on their own account? Not all poems, of course, but poems of this character, which engage possibility as a \textit{primum mobile} and last locomotive?\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

As ever, the approach is provisional, and meant to focus attention on something that Blackmur notices occurring in a poem.

Whether he is allowed to see what he sees is another question, and certainly the verses by Henry Adams might not pass Davie's muster, in part because he
notices a key to Blackmur’s practice: the secular analogue to devotional thinking, that I have been compelled to show by other lights. Davie objects to the principle:

The thing at the centre—thus the implication—is unutterable. The hush which falls, the ceremonious invocations of great names, the general impression that what goes on is terribly important and terribly difficult (one false step and we are done for)—all this creates the effect of a devotional act. And indeed Mr Blackmur, who is so respectful to the authority of Mr Eliot, seems perilously close sometimes to falling foul of the gibes that his master has cast at Matthew Arnold. For him too, as on Mr Eliot’s showing for Arnold, poetry seems to be attracting itself to the emotions and expectations proper only to religion. We remember Mr Eliot’s warning that one cannot be substituted for the other, and that to try to do this is justice to neither.

For him too, as for Arnold, it is poetry that has to carry this burden of religious feeling deflected from its proper object. Poetry, not poems; poetry, that is, considered not a the body of poems that have been or may be achieved, but as a quality or a condition of language never exemplified without some adulteration in even the greatest poems, seen there only by glimpses, fits and starts, a fortunate visitation on some one line or snatch of lines.34
Blackmur was indeed a close reader of T. S. Eliot, and knew his critique of Arnold intimately; he was not unaware of his own availability to parallel censure despite the passionate rejection of "art for art" which was his position from the very first. "I suppose that all these words so far make up to an odd way of following Arnold step by step on his touchstones," he says near the opening of "Lord Tennyson's Scissors" in 1951 (which is the final essay in the book Davie has been reviewing), "but I hope the pace is lighter and comes out in another world than his, though I do not know what world because I trust it is the world in which we live." Despite Davie’s assertion that we find grim devotional atmosphere in Blackmur, the style here strikes me as playful, with the added charm of play from an unpopular position. It is good to take the rôle of a dandy or a dirty, especially when out of keeping.

Blackmur also observed that critics on the whole are sometimes tempted into making outrageous claims. The claims themselves might be different in each case, but the temptation to run the train off the track was pretty consistent. Such temptation was not necessarily the result of a particular critic's misguided practice, but a product of behavior coming into contact with intellectual activity; a constant bugbear and necessary ghost in the application of thought. "One does not like in Montaigne any more than in Shelley or Arnold, Poe or Mallarmé or I. A. Richards, the assertion of untenable claims for poetry," Blackmur says placidly, but of course what comes clear in the assortment is that one might be very happy to have some record of all of these untenable claims.
Eliot’s famous criticism of Arnold’s famous "criticism of life" does make appearances in Blackmur’s essays, but it is not called up, as in Davie’s review, as a kind of devotional maxim to lead the straying lamb back to the flock. It comes with commentary, as a footnote to Blackmur’s essay on "Ash Wednesday" and *Murder in the Cathedral* in 1935:

It is perhaps relevant to quote here part of Mr. Eliot’s comment on Arnold’s "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life," in the essay on Arnold in *The Use of Poetry*. "At bottom: that is a great way down; the bottom is the bottom. At the bottom of the abyss is what few ever see, and what those cannot bear to look at for long; and it is not a 'criticism of life.' If we see life as a whole—not that Arnold ever saw life as a whole—from top to bottom, can anything that we can say of it ultimately, of that awful mystery, be called criticism?" Here Mr. Eliot, as he commonly does at important junctures, which are never arguable, resorts to the emotional version of the actual concerned. The "abyss" is one of his obsessive images.\(^{37}\)

Where Eliot sees poetry as a very different project than criticism, with the important detail that nothing called "criticism" can ever speak of the deepest and most awful mysteries, Blackmur puts a neat reassertion for the critical mind—it is in the form of a point of information, but he refreshes Arnold’s position after it has staled in Eliot’s critique. The point that bears focus, at least for Blackmur, is not a rhetorical
consideration that lends Arnold’s tendencies the aspect of a buffer-stop once debunked, but a dialectical consideration that finds value in the responses they produce, and how they are produced. The force is in relation; the mode for recording it critical like the mirror held to nature. Arnold was important because he generated a "vital reaction" in Eliot, whose "fight with, and use of, Matthew Arnold is life-long." The reaction, fight, and use all describe a body of conflict that is the true locus of interest for Blackmur, and choosing a winner would be as ridiculous as choosing the winner in a chemical reaction. Value is in the opposition. This is an echo of Blackmur’s call for a perfect scholar-critic: the correction of critical arrogance with scholarly devotion to the letter is precisely what Blackmur reads in Eliot’s reversal of St. Paul: "the spirit killeth, the letter giveth life"; "in which case," Blackmur writes, "Eliot was writing in the interests of criticism." The critical content that engages Eliot’s obsessive images in poems describes for Blackmur the force of Arnold’s reactive agent, at work in Eliot’s insights. And so my own obsessive image of a train derailment is brought to its felicity:

Eliot is a substance beseiged by orders. If we want to see this clearly we have only to think of how his criticism runs parallel to his poetry. There is a gap between, but the attraction across the gap is so strong that one train often runs on the other’s track. For Lancelot Andrewes is only understandable when Ash Wednesday and Little Gidding have been well read, and I rather
suspect that all three need, at some point but not at all points, the backward illumination of "The Hippopotamus":

Although he seems so firm to us
He is merely flesh and blood.

The contention of this essay, of course, is that R. P. Blackmur’s derailment is similar in type if not in magnitude, and that poems are understandable when his criticism has been well read.

Blackmur’s dialectical mode was probably a consious attempt to follow after Aristotle, but it is caught up with recording the significance of Matthew Arnold, and it is the best position from which to defend Arnold’s "criticism of life" to Eliot’s attack. Blackmur begins by succinctly showing Eliot’s tendency to use poetic images to generate consent in his criticism, then suggests that the tendency of poetic constructions to slip from argument into imagery is a variety of emotional justification. These are issues that arise from using poetic techniques in criticism, as surely issues arise from using critical techniques in poetry. But Blackmur is not concerned with whether Eliot’s poetry is able to serve the function of criticism, as Eliot has been concerned to show that criticism is not able to do the work of poetry. Instead Blackmur categorizes the poetic image as critical statement according to critical principles. He claims, in other words, perspective. An obsessive image is an emotional statement of position—a reassertion of St. Paul’s position on the spirit
and the letter. Such an image may be very effective, but from the position that Blackmur has established, success need not come into play at all. If the image were persuasive in the moment of encounter, before its paradox had been presented, this would be good propaganda, but at bottom merely a cosmetic result of good fortune and local politics. "Success," as Blackmur wrote, "seems to involve concession to oneself as well as to society."\textsuperscript{40}

One of the boons of Blackmur’s proclivities was the appreciation of failure. Failure lacked what Blackmur calls "\textit{make-believe}", and in daily life had all the familiar drawbacks. But in certain cases, Blackmur thought it the result of a refusal to concede to society and self: a truly heroic position to maintain if your reasons were adequate, so that magnanimous failure, even in verse, is often brought nobly into discourse alongside success. In the essay that compares John Brooks Wheelwright to William Carlos Williams, and the essay that compares Allen Tate to Ernest Hemingway (for examples) the writer with less "\textit{make-believe}" at his disposal is also nominated the more interesting of the pair by a stretch. The most difficult of these lessons is in the essay on Herbert Read and Wallace Stevens, where failure and success are most balanced; and failure most tragic, and deathly pale\textsuperscript{41}. Tragedy, for R. P. Blackmur, was an occasional attendant of criticism. He states his position on the matter in a note on Irving Babbitt:

To summon the tragic sense to the consideration of a critical mind is perhaps to stain our appreciation with raw colors, but if we do not think of the
absolute activities of the mind as tragic we have only a flat affair, a thing merely to reject. It is the special vividness, the life-giving quality of the tragic sense that it gives perspective, background, both to the ambition achieved and to the actuality consequently uncovered.42

Blackmur’s essay on Wheelwright and Williams is of particular interest on the score of success and failure, because Wheelwright was a friend of Blackmur’s, and their own, actualized private order is brought into confrontation with Williams’ "astonishing success" in a more public field. Blackmur’s analysis breezes past this success, pleads his own incapacity to follow Yvor Winters’ praiseful analysis of Williams’ poetry, and puts away the effectiveness in half a sentence: it "comes from the combination of a good ear for speech cadence and for the balance of meaning and sound, plus a facility for the double effect of weight and speed."43 The facts about his two poets that Blackmur actually wishes to deal in "have nothing to do with magnitude, which is a gift of heaven, and of which our appreciation depends as much on distance as on use." So the poets are shown by a contrast that does not include consideration of success, which looks something like this:

Dr. Williams has no perception of the normal; no perspective, no finality—for these involve, for imaginative expression, both the intellect which he distrusts and the imposed form which he cannot understand. What he does provide is a constant freshness and purity of language which infects with its
own qualities an otherwise gratuitous exhibition of the sense and sentiment of humanity run-down—averaged—without a trace of significance or a vestige of fate in the fresh familiar face.44

Whereas

The facts about Mr. Wheelwright are very much on the level of significance and fate; they make the matter of his preoccupation; and as they are delivered or aborted they make the failure or the success of his poems.45

Blackmur argues that it is the misfortune of figures like Wheelwright, not figures like Williams, to have no live tradition from which to build. A Williams does not understand form, and has constant recourse to the freshness of average reality when traditions are always dim and barren. A Wheelwright, in such a predicament, begins to form private societies—formal order and gesture manifest in friendship, not public life—and he makes primitive drawings with the substance of tradition, or private models of traditions mostly extinguished, among a symbolic imagination shared by only a few. There is a compulsion, in other words, to erect gods for sports; to treat some substance generated in friendship as the unutterable thing in the center. This would seem to be a result of the determined practice of taking poetry for religious ends that Donald Davie, after T. S. Eliot, deplores, but "diagnosis," as
Blackmur says, "is not cure". Deplorable or no, the result is a poem like Wheelwright’s "Sanct":

We know the Love the Father bears the Son
is a third Mask and that the Three form One.
We also know, machines and dynamos
Preservers in motion; Destroyers in repose
like visions of wheeled eyes the addict sees
are gods, not fashioned in our images.

Then let us state the unknown in the known:
The mechanism of our friendship, grown
transcendent over us, maintains a being
by seeing us when we grow lax in seeing,
although without our sight it could not be.
(One states, one does not solve, a mystery.)
This human Trinity is comprehended
when doubt of its divinity is ended.46

The dynamo echoes Henry Adams, and the erection of a god is explicit, and between friends, who are in any case among enemies. For Blackmur the failure of value systems brought them down into private experience and poetry, but this was a
phenomenon of circumstance more than will (or circumstance becoming will). The state of affairs was objectionable—not least to Eliot—but diagnosis was no cure. Religion couched in poetry, or poetry made to serve for religion, was analogous to doggerel: some quality of language glimpsed in its adulteration. This state of belief in his lifetime enriched Blackmur's interest in failed poems (which illustrated the situation in microcosm), and the parallel instances where poetry could be made to behave like religion between friends and in oracular critical statements. Young R. P. Blackmur, holding audience at the Dunster House Bookshop in the 1930s, pinning Ezra Pound's picture to the wall of his attic room, and intoning T. S. Eliot's poems late into the night was almost certainly a mendicant friar of his own particular sect.

But religious feeling in poetry was not to be hoped for: it was poetic failure (with the stress on the first word this time) and had real tragedy. Poetry made to serve for religion described the decline of a religious tradition, and so had a special role in illustrating the vastation of modern life. In a way, Blackmur's record of this activity is a documentary preference: the compulsion to make gods from scratch, very much alive among Harvard poets of the 'thirties like John Brooks Wheelwright, was more striking to Blackmur than the "exhibition of the sense and sentiment of humanity run down", and equally illustrative from a certain perspective. For Blackmur, private attempts to make value from the symbolic imagination were representative of the kind of thing that was happening to belief in his time. Yet Blackmur's sense of the interplay of poetry and religion was not based on blanket
mysticism, but on the observable phenomenon that the texts of ancient religions eventually became available only as poetry. To poets like Blackmur who were awake to this—but convinced by Eliot—the felt availability of Christian imagery only as material for poems must have had disconcerting precedents. But diagnosis is no cure.

Poetry is by no means to be understood as anything but an *inadequate* substitute for religion; and it is because we can take Greek mythology—or Buddhist, or Egyptian—only as poetry that we cannot take it as religion. More important, while the religious imagination is poetic, the poetic imagination is only rarely religious and when it is so is something else as well. What that something else is cannot be said of an individual, for it is what the individual draws from, but we know its connections well enough when we speak of a race or a culture in the aspect of its religion. It is the power of creating or discovering symbols which are the sources as well as the reminders of meaning, and which, once recognized, are inexhaustible, and are, so to speak, fertile in themselves. The man—and whether he be poet, philosopher, priest, or some other accident of consciousness, makes no matter—the man who uses the symbolic imagination must find the most part of his poetry already written for him out of the live, vast waste of disorder of the actual, out of those myths which as Jung says somewhere we may think of as the dreams of the people—the needful vision of the tribe. He must write deliberately out of the anonymous, contributing only the name, the order, of
the given instance. The symbolic imagination perhaps can be put as the means of bringing to significance, to order, the knowledge we have above and below the level of the mind. It is, in short, the chief mode of participation in the life common to all men at all times.48

"Mr. Eliot has his own arguments," Blackmur says earlier in the same essay "which are best read by those of his own persuasion."

We see Blackmur's subdued quarrel with Eliot most clearly in moments like this, and the previous comment on his "obsessive images". Broken down to fundamentals, it is a simple disagreement: Eliot ascribes to dogma; Blackmur spends the duration of his life wrestling elaborations from his adolescent insights, as laid out in a letter to George Anthony Palmer in 1921:

You say you believe nothing. Do you not mean that you mistrust everything? For really, in this world we can never be certain of anything. Let me give you my creed: I believe in none of the various gods thus far thrust upon the credulous, nor do I disbelieve in them, I let them pass, for they do not bother me. C'est tout.49

They would come to bother him somewhat, but Blackmur's position continued to allow his critical fascination with the emergence and failure of various small gods—or, the live decline of Christian belief into poetry—and to enrich his fascination with
dogma as it played out for Eliot. Eliot engaged in a more dedicated quarrel with I. A. Richards over poetry and belief in the mid-1920s, and Richard Blackmur is in a way a monster of Richards' projection for "a possible development of the human mind in which sensibility and intellect will in some way be separated, in which 'belief' will consist in the provisional assent given to tenable scientific hypotheses, and in which sensibility will no longer be hampered by the restrictions of what happens to be felt as true at any particular time" (the description is Eliot's)\(^50\). Yet Blackmur was an extant monster. His response to belief in Eliot is never levied in so many words, but it takes a quiet form of Eliot's response to Richards: "I can believe my own and his too, whereas he is limited to his own."\(^51\)

It is with this in mind, perhaps, that Blackmur writes most carefully when writing on T. S. Eliot—far more carefully than when he writes about the US State Department, for example\(^52\). Blackmur is often the better for using his authority for tact. He has a skill in synthesizing obscure information into concrete and memorable phrases—presenting direct if sometimes leaky and questionable routes to complex notions—but this technique works best when one has already a sense of the places "under words" where she is being directed, or when she knows the bright entity for which his language provides face and surface. There is fine clarity in Blackmur's glosses: on the content of Ezra Pound's Cantos, or in omnibus reviews that sum up nine poets in half as many pages, and especially in this briefest statement on Eliot's criticism in "Unappeasable and Peregrine", an essay that really focuses on *Four Quartets*:
Eliot took up his burden early and has never been able quite to balance the load. His most important early essay was on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in which the continuous modifiable whole of all literature was maintained as simultaneously existing.\textsuperscript{53}

Does an effective condensation of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" into fourteen words somehow offer its own insight? If so, it is by methods related to translation.

In "Masks of Ezra Pound" Blackmur asserts the greatness of Pound's translations, compared to his "original: poems: how well translation suits his unspoken need for a controlling framework and so give him his greatest freedom as a poet. Robert Lowell echoed this, in the sense that it was always a sort of statement about the critic's own proclivities, in his reminiscence of Blackmur as "a good poet, weird, tortured, derivative, original—and more a poet in his criticism."\textsuperscript{54} Blackmur, like Pound, looked most like a poet when he dealt with another poetry. But Blackmur was hesitant about awarding Pound the particular laurel deposited by T. S. Eliot in the Introduction to his own selection of Pound's poems\textsuperscript{55}. The comment is mentioned briefly in both of Blackmur's famous essays on Pound, but more tellingly in the later version, "Adjunct to the Muses' Diadem":

Poets like Pound are the executive artists for their generation; he does not provide a new way of looking, and I think Eliot is mistaken in thinking his work an example of Arnold’s criticism of life, but he provides the means of many ways of looking.\(^56\)

Blackmur’s supposition, maintained through the play around T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold that has been discussed, is that poetry can live, or do something analogous to living, in a critical mode. When Pound’s unsuccessful verse tended towards something like ideogrammatic doggerel, Blackmur would argue that this was not the result of the simple choice to use verse for criticism: Pound’s was a very different kind of failure, the failure to effectively criticize.

the verse which is left after he has selected and compressed what voices he wants to be heard, will be both a result of criticism and a species of criticism itself, and the better the criticism the better the verse. Where the critical labor has been foregone and the other, commonplace kind of personality has been brought in as a substitute, the dull reading of duller gossip in bad verse is the result.\(^57\)

It would have been useful to Blackmur’s argument if he himself had been a great poet. T. S. Eliot’s responded to the submission of one of Blackmur’s early poems, a "A Funeral for a Few Sticks"—which is included in this edition in its
earliest published form, of March, 1927—in a letter that Blackmur told George Anthony Palmer was the best he had ever received:

30 July 1926

Dear Mr Blackmur,

I am returning herewith a long poem which you sent me nearly a year ago. The reason that I have kept it for so long is that I was enough interested in it to want to repay you by some sort of critical comment and I have not had time to do so. It is all the more difficult because this poem is not one which can be re-written: it is too good for that. No criticism of detail would matter very much. What I think is that it is too thoughtful. That is to say, the harder you think and the longer you think the better: but in turning thought into poetry it has to be fused into a more definite pattern of immediately apprehensible imagery, imagery which shall have its own validity and be immediately the equivalent of, and indeed identical with, the thought behind it. A great many very good poems just miss reaching this point. The result is something which we have to think instead of immediately apprehending. The more thought that is turned into poetry the better; only it must be, in the final form, felt thought.

I express myself very badly on a difficult matter, but I hope that you will take this letter as intended encouragement and send me something more.
I should be very glad to see your essay on Pound’s Cantos.

Yours very truly,

T. S. Eliot

In the meantime, Blackmur's first essay on the Cantos, entitled "Amazing Poetry", had appeared in the Saturday Review of Literature, committing a more intense gush about Pound, or perhaps any poet, than Blackmur ever later put his name to. "Amazing as the work may be—and surely it is the most amazing poem of our time—it is as classical in spirit and manner as Dante or T. S. Eliot." Yet it would be wrong to read "Amazing Poetry" with a deracinated sense of what Blackmur means by "amazing". "The soul of a word annihilates its convention, dessicates thought," Blackmur wrote George Anthony Palmer in 1922. The "most amazing poem of our time" is also amazing in its eldest sense, the one careful readers of a poet like Pound might bother to know or venture to suspect: "Causing distraction, consternation, dismay; stupefying, terrifying, dreadful". Blackmur's poems are filled with this kind of etymological complication, almost cute enough to read like jokes. The praise offered to Pound is not retracted by the history of the word, but praise is orchestrated on a lower level than the statement about qualities of his shortcomings. Both exist in a simultaneous utterance, and anybody uninterested in the complexities of judgment can take away a sense of a critic’s mere sparkling approval. Blackmur, in a continuation of the same letter to George Anthony Palmer in 1922, describes a context for his early critical writing:
The record of current beliefs is interesting: I read a book by some woman called Contemporary Voices, consisting of an anthology of modern English and American verse interspersed with essays: it is supposed to instruct, with veracity, the novice, and to show people what is good. I quote from memory: "Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot are undeniably alarmingly clever . . . but their cleverness is beyond me. Perhaps there is nothing in it! That's what I think. Mr. Pound would do better to quit writing verse, and restrict himself to discovering queer geniuses, and making cat calls from the gallery . . . H. D. is very nice in her own way, but her work is one of the poorer kinds of poetry. William Carlos Williams is unutterably ugly, stupid, etc. etc." I believe this book is regarded as authoritative; it is used in colleges. One remembers that the poets mentioned, with one or two exceptions (Cummings and Mitchell) are the only poets in America approaching greatness, and one sees in this book that Amy Lowell, is "undeniably a genius:" one says a number of things. I could not have written Exacerbations if E. P. were not great; further, I would be unhappy, if T. S. Eliot should prove stupid, not great . . . .

The book in question is certainly *New Voices: An Introduction to Contemporary Poetry* by Marguerite Wilkinson, and Blackmur's paraphrase is accurate:
Almost as much as radicals differ from conservatives do radicals like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound differ from radicals like Carl Sandburg and James Oppenheim. Their emotions are not redundant, but spare. Their style is not oratorical. Their voices are not orotund, but sly, insinuating, satirical, and, occasionally, shrill. They are poets of the world and very far from the folk. They are undeniably alarmingly clever. Notice these lines from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot:

"Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table."

The comparison would never come into the mind of a stupid man, of an unsophisticated man. It is clever, also, to speak of the "damp souls of housemaids." It is clever to say that the laughter of a certain Mr. Apollinax "was submarine and profound." It is such cleverness that one finds in Mr. Eliot's work. It is for such things, as much as for anything else, that his admirers praise him. His sketches of personality are dry and hard. His comment on the complex lives of worldlings is all entertaining. But a poet must be more than clever and entertaining to merit the attention of many readers. A brittle æstheticism is not enough.
As for Mr. Pound, it is difficult to write about him. He is so clever that one mentions him with trepidation, knowing how much amused he would be at the wrong thing said. The truth of the matter is that Mr. Pound is too clever to be a poet. He ought to spend his time in discovering geniuses and explaining talent and genius to a less clever world. For whether one agrees with him or not, he is frequently interesting as a critic. 64

Ms. Wilkinson goes on to say various things. "Louis Untermeyer, our shrewd American critic, has made a series of amusing parodies of Mr. Pound’s style which the ordinary person will enjoy rather more than the originals”; "If only Mr. Pound were less clever, he might be a very good poet”; and so on. But Wilkinson’s comment on Eliot is different in kind than Blackmur’s letter might suggest. Blackmur is not responding to any indication that Eliot is stupid, but to the idea that his poetry would be better if it were less clever and more available to stupid people. Consciously or not, the scheme Blackmur has arranged from this text upholds Eliot’s greatness with the incompatibility of great poetry and demands for accessibility. Reacting to Wilkinson’s particularly thin criticism Blackmur is fierce, and dissolves her with acid pleasure. But in the course of dissolution he identifies greatness with obscurity, accessibility with stupidity (a word Wilkinson, not Blackmur, has raised in discourse). There is a questionable proof that plays between these texts, worth remembering as a reference point for Blackmur’s poetry: if Eliot were understandable to stupid people, he might be stupid himself; if Eliot were stupid,
readers like Blackmur would be isolated in a world dominated by Marguerites Wilkinson. And if Blackmur had no distinguished touchstone to name his predicament obscurity, incomprehensible to the world at large, he would simply be abnormal and unhappy. Rather than this, he would write the criticism himself: a way of making gods with friends. This is how the poetry of R. P. Blackmur appears both in verse and criticism. In either case it represents a perfect order, privately realized.

The Poems

The statements in R. P. Blackmur’s poems do not make sense. There is no legend for appreciation in this insight, but it should give pause: Blackmur’s facile acrobatics through sentences of his criticism, his ability to keep several plates importantly spinning but arrive at a conclusion with the sound of sense, is one of his gifts as a writer and one of the pleasures of reading him. It is with this felicity that his criticism becomes inimitable, and seems to approach the condition of poetry. But one is headed off at the pass: while the criticism approaches poetry, the poems make it difficult to classify Blackmur as a poet, so that the nonsense syntax in unfrilled vocabulary (persistent in his first book of poems, From Jordan’s Delight) appears to be Blackmur’s overcompensation for his reputation as a critic. Perhaps, one thinks, this book is inscrutable for its own sake—a backing away from rational construction that moves in the wrong direction, alienates, and fails. I think this sort of
interpretation should be kept in mind with suspicion. To use it, one must not only imagine that Blackmur misjudged the peculiarity of his offerings despite brilliant analyses of his most important contemporaries, but must forcefully apply a psychological or emotional interpretation to poetry that—simultaneously—one wants to criticize for being overly-intellectual, divorced from emotion, and obscure. What is going on in these poems? The interpretive bind on appreciating them is as nonsensical as they appear to be themselves.

The challenge of the poems is first of all to read them, and it is noteworthy that Blackmur's commentators have not been willing to do so on the whole—at least not with the kind of delicate, charged reading that Blackmur perpetually gave to others. Russell Fraser's biography, *A Mingled Yarn*, rightly gives focus to a record of psychological events and confused critical reception, and Denis Donoghue, in his introduction to the 1977 *Poems of R. P. Blackmur*, states that "It is probably wise to approach the poems by admitting that they have not, or at least not yet, established themselves as exerting much pressure upon contemporary poetry."65 While the factual statement contained in the caveat is true, and while it may be wise to take Donoghue's method for external reasons—not least shielding one's critical reputation from reproof—Marguerite Wilkinson has demonstrated the dangers of any leap to a mass judgment as a criterion of value, and the leap is implicit in using it as an "approach". "T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" Blackmur quotes Ophelia's phrase repeatedly in his 1954 essay "Between the Numen and the Moha", and Donoghue returns to the line, again in his Introduction:
When Ophelia says, "To have seen what I have seen, see what I see," there is little point in offering explanations based on the chain of being, the structure of Elizabethan parliaments, the hermetic tradition, theatres indoor and outdoor, and so forth. We sway with the rhythm of feeling, or we withhold ourselves: there is no other choice.\textsuperscript{66}

What Donoghue withholds from Ophelia’s line, against Blackmur’s punctuation, is not sense but exuberance.

Exuberance is problematic, as it is required in some form for good readings of many kinds of poems, but does not answer requirements. One would often prefer that the poems supply the exuberance, but some arguments against this sort of provision may be found throughout R. P. Blackmur’s criticism, and are detailed in the first section of this critique. To recall one passage briefly:

It is when you have lost, or think you are about to lose, the objective recognition of your values, that you assert them most violently and in their most extreme form—as every unrequited lover knows. You either go into the desert, kill yourself, pull your shell over your head, or set up in a new business: in any case, whether lover or artist, being as conspicuous as possible about it.\textsuperscript{67}
Ophelia was an unrequited lover at the time.

Dr. Donoghue’s list of pointless explanations is bent on convincing his reader that R. P. Blackmur "was interested in explanations, subject to the qualification that he thought them ultimately beside the point." This justifies the critical frame of *Poems of R. P. Blackmur*, subject to the qualification that it supplies a false bottom: if Blackmur was merely "interested" in explanations, but shrugged at their real value, then the explanations supplied for his poems can be mostly condiments; offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, and unapologetically unnecessary to the text. I see a very different orientation in R. P. Blackmur's own comments on explanation, where he says for example, "The criticism and scholarship of an age would seem most often to be determined by the minimum necessity seen in the twin problems of how to account for art and how to relate it to its audience."68 I am not certain that the position Dr. Donoghue attributes to Blackmur may be found in print: so far I have not come across it. It is also the case that Donoghue's possible explanations for Ophelia's exclamation, while they are different in matter, are all alike in type: each represents a point of historical information, from which some other field of inquiry can be extrapolated. The problems with this sort of analysis are well-known, and crop up on the very first page of William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, where he has been providing an explanation for the text "The brown cat sat on the red mat":

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'Explanation,' by choice of terms, may be carried in any direction the explainer wishes; thus to translate and analyse the notion of 'sat' might involve a course of anatomy; the notion of 'on' a theory of gravitation. Such a course, however, would be irrelevant not only to my object in this essay but to the context implied by the statement, the person to whom it seems to be addressed, and the purpose for which it seems to be addressed to him; nor would you be finding out anything very fundamental about the sentence by analysing it in this way; you would merely be making another sentence, stating the same fact, but designed for a different purpose, context and person. Evidently, the literary critic is much concerned with implications of this last sort, and must regard them as a main part of the meaning. There is a difference (you may say between thought and feeling) between the fact stated and the circumstance of the statement, but very often you cannot know one without knowing the other, and an apprehension of the sentence involves both without distinguishing between them. Thus I should consider as on the same footing the two facts about this sentence, that it is about a cat and that it is suited for a child. And I should only isolate two of its 'meanings,' to form an ambiguity worth notice; it has contradictory associations, which might cause some conflict in the child who heard it, in that it might come out of a fairy story and might come out of Reading without Tears.⁶⁹
Donoghue's rejection of explanation, on Blackmur's behalf, is limiting: the examples he gives for "explanation" are only the one kind. Meanwhile, Blackmur suggests four methods to the disappointed suitor, and I will take these as four methods for approaching R. P. Blackmur's poems.

1

You go into the desert

Perhaps it would not be without interest to begin with one of Blackmur's many early poems of unrequited love:

Have you heard the shudder of the wind
The timid wind wishing it were water
Motionless as dust
Scorched beneath a new born sun?
So I feel when the thrust of my lips
Is repulsed for my pennyness.

The opening question, when only the first line has been read, sounds like a cliché: it could begin any number of poems of a certain tenor, and launch a description of the world in several kinds of windy weather. But the quality of the question changes as
the image occasioned by "the shudder of the wind" undoes itself against what describes it, most forcefully in the word "motionless". "Have you heard the shudder of the wind?" is almost a rhetorical question, probably meant to generate an emotion and exuberance using an implied image, that may or may not include: night, trees or grasses shaking, gathering storms of social conflict, a window shutter banging in a gale. "Have you heard the shudder of motionless wind?" seems to elude images almost entirely—it is esoteric or nothing—and requires a different sort of answer.

But this moves somewhat too fast. "Motionless" is not the maid of all work, and the dissolution of the image is really occasioned more gradually, in interplay with each of the following lines, which behave more like dessication than electric shock, and leave the impression that they could be simple description. There is the wind. The quality of the wind changes when it becomes "timid" and wishes to be water: the gale subsides and slows. Is a timid wind more breeze-like? Does one really hear the "shudder" of a breeze? Wind wishing to be water, the riverbed dries up: "motionless as dust", and the scorch of desert sun. This is all part of the initial question still, but there is a sequence of images, and these describe the nature of the experience the speaker asks after, according to their succession.

So dissected, this is a little imagist poem, and worth comparing with one of the five small specimens of very early imagism by its pioneering proponent T. E. Hulme:
AUTUMN

A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.71

The complication in Blackmur's poem, as opposed to an imagist poems like this, is in the apprehension of circumstance. To whom is Hulme's speaker speaking? It does not much matter; it is a depiction of events with a sequence, but it has no politics in its presentation to speak of. The "I" in Hulme has very little character; he is a floating eye seeing things around him, with vision apparently sharpened on and intoxicated by the disconnection. It would be more obvious to compare such a poem to Blackmur's, if Blackmur's began: "I hear the shudder of the wind / The timid wind wishing it were water", and so went on. The element that distorts is the posed question, which positions the speaker with or against whomever he is addressing. His experience being what it is—and it is of the type of Hulme's experience, if not the tenor—Blackmur's speaker presents it without much luxury, and produces, suddenly, a live problem: when I tell you these things, do you understand me?
This is not a question asked in reverie, but when there is doubt, when reverie ends. Who puts to an auditor the question of whether he hears the shudder of motionless winds risks the reply, Do I hear what?, if not a glazed expression. Who asks "Have you heard the shudder of the wind?" has the advantage of knowing that you have likely heard something like a shudder from some sort of wind, and that the question can therefore be used as a rhetorical device, asking that you implicate your own experience in reading the poem, but not asking that you understand the poem's whole structure a priori. The example from T. E. Hulme presents a whole formal structure, but does not ask for any involvement from the reader, except perhaps the kind of approval given to the moon when seen. T. E. Hulme resembles the moon, and never asks how much you understand.

Blackmur's speaker does more than ask: he poses the question, and then explains that the image he is asking about is really just an illustration of the way he is feeling, and he is feeling this way because he has been rejected in love, because he's dead broke. This is an explanation that follows his question, but it is also another degree of desiccation of the primary image. No matter if you have not heard the wind, the water, the motionless dust, and so forth: it's just the way I'm feeling. Wind is an element mostly motion; perhaps its shudder is stillness. The breakdown of the image into the stuff of personal events and the facts of daily life is, for Blackmur, the last stage of the painful arrest of motion. To so collapse possibility into banal detail is both the experience of being rejected in love for practical reasons, and an illustration of entering the desert. Quotidian reality follows, when
wind is turned to dust. But by implicating the speaker, and this genre of statement, in the procedure of an imagistic scheme, quotidian reality is transmuted: it becomes another image for the desert, and is implicated in the rehearsal of poetic experience that has been hitherto implied.

This little poem is the second section of a typescript poem that appears in the section From Letters to George, and the title of the two sections together is "The Eternal prayer". R. P. Blackmur was interested, from a secular perspective, in the phenomenon of prayer, which, like questioning, it is a convention implied in parts of the language. When there is talk of devotional poetry, Blackmur wrote,

We mean as a rule poetry that constructs, or as we say expresses, a personal emotion about God, and I think it requires something approaching a saint to be very often successful in such constructions; and a saint, as Mr. Eliot observes, would limit himself if he undertook much devotional poetry. Otherwise, whatever the sincerity, private devotions are likely to go by rote and intention rather than rise to a represented state; there enters too much the question of what ought to be felt to the denigration (and I should say to God’s eye) of what is actually felt—and it is this characteristic predicament of the devout which cripples the development of poets like Hopkins and Crashaw so that we value them most in other, hindered qualities than the devout. It is perhaps indicative in this context of devotional poetry considered as poetry to remember how few from twenty Christian centuries
are the great prayers. It would seem that an earnest repetition of the General Confession is a more devout if less emotional act than the composition of a poem.\(^\text{72}\)

Prayer is the sort of activity that interested Blackmur as an analogue for poetry, using much of the same medium. His most dedicated essay on the subject quotes the central thesis of George Santayana’s *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*: "The idea is that religion and poetry are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry."\(^\text{73}\) The texts that religions presented for daily use among the faithful—the prayers—could stimulate great acts of devotion, but were not themselves great poems.

It is probably too great a leap to assert from here that R. P. Blackmur’s poetry aspires to the condition of a secular equivalent to prayer, though Santayana sets a tempting example by making the statement I have quoted a few pages into his preface. When Blackmur cites Henry Adams’ devotional verses, the quality he most notes and admires in them is the enormous movement under the words, the "act of piety" they imply, the words themselves being regrettable. R. P. Blackmur’s poems share this quality; they aim to guide an act of piety of one kind or another, singing the quest for inspiration or proximity to the dim divinity at the center. Prayer is functional: it includes the acknowledgment of failure, the exile that is sin (or its
analogue, behavior), and its remorse. Like much of literary criticism, the poems are most valuable to those who share the faith, and are carrying it into the desert.

Here, for reference, is the General Confession:

Almighty and most merciful Father;
We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.
We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.
We have offended against thy holy laws.
We have left undone those things which we ought to have done;
And we have done those things which we ought not to have done;
And there is no health in us.
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders.
Spare thou them, O God, who confess their faults.
Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.
And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.74

And here are the key verses from Henry Adams:

Help me to bear! not my own baby load,
But yours; who bore the failure of the light,
The strength, the knowledge and the thought of God,—

The futile folly of the Infinite. 75

And here, at last, is R. P. Blackmur:

If righteousness without its faith is sin
and faith without its sin is empty act,
how shall the armed man plead? or soul save skin?
Between the lover and his murder pact
there is the third lost face, self looking in. 76

Adams’ verses share a belief structure that resembles the General Confession more closely than Blackmur’s, but there is the difference (I mean "under" the words) of attested pride: he asks to share the burden of infinity. This is a twist on dogma, with a tinge of hubris about its earnestness, but it amounts to something similar to an act of confession: feeling unworthy, and asking for reconciliation with God. The reconciliation in this case is radical: not only a request for the wholeness of communion, but an assertion that communion would include a shared, awakened perspective on the nature of reality, like God’s perspective. The burden of sin is cast as the desert of its quotidian particularity: to be isolated among one’s own baby burdens is distance from God; reconciliation would mean comprehension of a greater burden still.
In various essays of the 1950s, R. P. Blackmur asserts the social problems produced by a simultaneous disintegration of tradition, and the rise of an "intellectual proletariat" that has no access to belief, but plenty of access to facts and modes of disbelief that produce despair, while denouncing relation to the vestiges of tradition. "We think we can make the intellectual with the tools of the new illiteracy," Blackmur wrote, "All we do is uproot an increasing number of individuals from any vital relation either to society or themselves." Art, in such a situation, takes the aspect of a daydream, and "Most people," Blackmur notes, "like their daydreams to conform to their normal expectations and immediate ambitions and to do so in familiar forms." Taken together, a General Confession seems far from the plan of action; an act of contrite piety like Henry Adams’ will to compass infinity by faith, equally far.

Blackmur’s small poem—though parts of the language ("sin", "soul", "righteousness") would be familiar to his forebears—is an act of contrition that starts from a position of skepticism. I submit that this could be Blackmur’s way of achieving something like a General Confession, and claiming some of Adams’ benefits on the score of the infinite, amid the deracinated modern mind: to raise faith as a logical proof. Righteousness, faith, and sin could be $a, b,$ and $x$: positing them in relation releases the necessity of belief, but engages the experience of guilt, draws it into the poem, and gives a possibility of release in the image of "the third lost face, self looking in". Guilt is one of the experiences that becomes homeless without a religious tradition, though it persists, and reconciliation seems less
possible if you cannot believe in anything to which you might be reconciled. One is, so to speak, in the desert. It need be only mentioned here that Blackmur was not a believer himself, that this poem is one of dozens of his "Scarabs for the Living", and that the decline of the Egyptian religion into poetry and knicknacks was not far from his mind. Nor, for that matter, was the fact that Adams' poem was one he carried around in his pocket, "like an amulet".

There are more complex examples in the body of Blackmur's work, but I hope that there is weight to the line I have been following that compares the poems to prayer. The germ of this comparison lies in my assertion that each poem provides a rehearsal of experience that corresponds to a shape of thought, meant to be actively replayed by the reader as a prayer is actively replayed in the faithful mind. In the 1930s Blackmur might have called this an "exercise in mystical intuition". The exercise can take many different shapes, and an example of such a rehearsal is condensed in the guiding image for this section: going into the desert, being tempted there, and returning. The desert island Jordan's Delight, or its unnamed twin in the "Sea Island Miscellany", are geographical explorations akin to temptations in the desert, but the multiple forms of poem, carefully ordered and re-ordered as their textual variants attest, are not only descriptions, but attempts at forming proper sequences of action. The quasi-space of the "Labyrinth of Being" that appears in the same collection is another clue. Confusion is appropriate within each place, but there is a proper sequence for the trial.
I will not offer a top-to-bottom reading of "From Jordan’s Delight", but in the interest of coming full circle on some of the issues in this section, I will direct attention to the fourth section of the poem: "Con coloriti flori et herba". The title is taken from a line from the "Cantico del Sole" of St. Francis, but Blackmur’s spelling does not match most versions: many give "fiore" or "fior" instead "flori". In 1961 Blackmur revised the spelling for the Yale Series of Recorded Poets, for "fiori". But the spelling does match the version that appears in Henry Adams' *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, where it appears in full, together with commentary and a prose translation by Adams, all of which I will include for their obvious relevance and interest to the poem at hand:

Francis held the simplest and most childlike form of pantheism. He carried to its last point the mystical union with God, and its necessary consequence of contempt and hatred for intellectual processes. Even Saint Bernard would have thought his ideas wanting in that "mesure" which the French mind so much prizes. At the same time we had best try, as innocently as may be, to realize that no final judgment has yet been pronounced, either by the Church or by society or by science, on either or any of these points; and until mankind finally settles to a certainty where it means to go, or whether it means to go anywhere, —what its object is, or whether it has an object,— Saint Francis may still prove to have been its ultimate expression. In that
case, his famous chant—the "Cantico del Sole"—will be the last word of
religion, as it was probably its first. Here it is—too sincere for translation:—

CANTICO DEL SOLE

... Laudato sie, misignore, con tucte le tue creature
spetialmente messor lo frate sole
lo quale iorno et allumini noi per loi
    et ellu e bellu e radiante cum grane splendore
de te, altissimo, porta significacione.

Laudato si, misignore, per sora luna e le stelle
in celu lai formate clarite et pretiose et belle.
    Laudato si, misignore, per frate vento
et per aere et nubilo et sereno et onne tempo
per lo quale a le tue creature dai sustentamento.

Laudato si, misignore, per sor aqua
la quale e multo utile et humile et pretiosa et casta.
    Laudato si, misignore, per frate focu
per lo quale enallumini la nocte
ed ello e bello et jocondo et robustoso et forte.
Laudato si, misignore, per sora nostra matre terra
la quale ne sustena et governa
et produce diversi fructi con coloriti flori et herba.

Laudato si, misignore, per sora nostra morte corporale
de la quale nullu homo vivente po skappare
guai acquelli ke morrano ne le peccata mortali. . .

The verses, if verses they are, have little or nothing in common with the art of Saint Bernard or Adam of Saint-Victor. Whatever art they have, granting that they have any, seems to go back to the cave-dwellers and the age of stone. Compared with the naïveté of the "Cantico del Sole," the "Chanson de Roland" or the "Iliad" is a triumph of perfect technique. The value is not in the verse. The "Chant of the Sun" is another "Pons Seclorum"—or perhaps rather a "Pons Sanctorum"—over which only children and saints can pass. It is almost a paraphrase of the sermon to the birds. "Thank you, mi signore, for a messor brother son, in especial, who is your symbol; and for sister moon and the stars; and for brother wind and air and sky; and for sister water; and for brother fire; and for mother earth! We are all yours, mi signore! We are your children; your household; your feudal family! but we never heard of a Church. We are all varying forms of the same ultimate energy; shifting symbols of the same absolute unity; but our only unity, beneath you, is
nature, not law! We thank you for no human institutions, even for those established in your name; but, with all our hearts we thank you for sister our mother earth and its fruits and coloured flowers!"82

Turning to Blackmur's poem, there is an unusual prominence of bric-à-brac:

O flowering mosses
Flowering stone
Above the barnacles and sea urchins
Above the lichen and the washing weed
The slow heave the pull the give and lift
O fugitive
Quiet almost it is so far and freed
Translucent waters are
When the wave crosses

Much of it is flowers:

Such is the red stonecrop
The purpling pink sea-pea
The blue legume with bluest bloom
And blue harebell
Laced in the fissured dripping rock

This sort of description is only peculiar because Blackmur so often aims for the force of statements, and avoids or supresses imagery. "Statement is better than 'image'," he wrote to George Anthony Palmer in 1923, "it is more than image, it recognises passion, which 'image' does not necessarily"\textsuperscript{83}. The poem above is closer to T. E. Hulme's imagism—in terms of the arrangement of images outside of the context of a speaker's use—than to R. P. Blackmur's short poem from "The Etenal prayer". The sudden burst of flowers is unusual, and unusually bare; it comes from a different voice than much of the rest of the poem. Consider it beside Blackmur's comment on E. E. Cummings' frequent, perhaps obsessive, use of the word "flower":

If we take Mr. Cummings' most favoured word "flower" and inspect the uses to which he puts it, we should have some sort of key to the kind of poetry he writes. In \textit{Tulips and Chimneys} the word "flower" turns up, to a casual count, forty-eight times, and in \&, a much smaller volume, twenty-one times. We have among others the following: smile like a flower; riverly as a flower; steeped in burning flowers; last flower; lipping flowers; more silently than a flower; snow flower; world flower; softer than flowers; forehead a flight of flowers; feet are flowers in vases; air is deep with flowers; slow supple flower of beauty; flower-terrible; flower of thy mouth; stars and flowers; mouth a new flower; flower of silence; god's flowers; flowers of reminding;
dissonant flowers; flower-stricken air; Sunday flower; tremendous flower; speaking flower; flowers of kiss; futile flowers; etc., etc. Besides the general term there is a quantity of lilies and roses, and a good assortment of daisies, pansies, buttercups, violets, and chrysanthemums. There are also many examples of such associated words as "petals" and "blooms" and "blossoms," which, since they are similarly used, may be taken as alternative to flowers.

Now it is evident that this word must attract Mr. Cummings' mind very much; it must contain for him an almost unlimited variety and extent of meaning; as the mystic says god, or at least as the incomplete mystic repeats the name of god to every occasion of his soul, Mr. Cummings in some of his poems says flower.  

"Con coloriti flori et herba" sits in Blackmur's body of work, where it is part of a prayer without dogma, wandering among and tempted by, various gods. Blackmur's prayers are critical, and the temptations of the mystical intuition crop volubly: embodied in the style of the poems, bursts of desert flowers.

II

you kill yourself

The subheading looks bleak, but serves its function: Blackmur's quarrel with Cummings looks purely technical, but was built on the assertion that Cummings' poetics could not compass the reality of death. Saint Francis, as Henry Adams
observes, had the same haunt, the same genre of denial, and all in all a similar problem:

one sister whom no one loved, and for whom, in his first verses, Francis had rendered no thanks. Only on his death-bed he added the lines of gratitude for "our sister death," the long-sought, never-found sister of the schoolmen, who solved all philosophy and merged multiplicity in unity.85

While Blackmur accused Cummings of developing special, private meanings for the word "flower", Blackmur developed very special, more or less private meanings for the word "die". In From Jordan's Delight alone there are 38 instances; The Good European is just 36 pages long, and has twelve. Examples include: An act of God who does not die this day; by ill and various violence have died; all but the light die; died fishing; life that still can die; I lay sick and like to die; no earth in which to die; Behold what gods have died; Sometimes as if forewarned before we die; the god lessens and dies; I see nothing dead and nothing die; the potato cooks flat with no taste of death; that indifferent will in which we die; god's death again; each image shifts or dies; would enter love, would die; silence of something about to die; life goes on though substance die; passes on my breath, and dies; death ravens in arrear; death's gulf yawning in the gut; make a true die; death alone shall be impossible; his own death quick; death climbs live veins; death that ends voice; Death, as it signals us; This man was yours, O Death; in death, the hero rules; the weight of death will
fall; the death we do this day put off; some die, but mostly only stun; the second of death; condemned to image death in each live heart; the laying on of death; green life eating into death aloud; Death, or its equivalent in knowledge; our own death, tiding; dying parts still climb; each man dying sows the wind; promise of slow dying; death is homage due; my sighing is yourself dying.

The word must attract Blackmur's mind very much, and the critical question that his use of it raises is very much the same as the issue at stake with Cummings' "flower". It will do to replace "Cummings" with "Blackmur" in this portion of his essay:

The question is, whether or not the reader can possibly have shared the experience which Mr. Cummings has had of the word; whether or not it is possible to discern, after any amount of effort, the precise impact which Mr. Cummings undoubtedly feels upon his whole experience when he uses the word.86

In Blackmur's defense, the word "death" has more of its own gravity from a certain perspective, and may attract more impact if not more precision than "flowers". The parallel insight, the track on which the train goes in the opposite direction, is described in one of Blackmur's later essays, according to which certain words are able to honorably take a great deal of weight. It is 1942, and the essay is "Language as Gesture":

86
In Hamlet's best-known soliloquy there is a passage in which the repetition of two words draws upon the reservoir of chthonic meaning but with a different effect upon the words themselves:

To die: to sleep,
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream; aye, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

Here it is the context that determines the meaningfulness that the words die and sleep and their variants take on in the process of becoming gesture; but once determined, that meaningfulness, that over-arching gesture, carries on through the rest of the soliloquy and beyond, into Hamlet's answer to Ophelia's query how he is: "I humbly thank you: well, well, well," which as gesture moves us to other than the literal sense. It is all the ill of doubt and trepidation before the unknown prospect which the words "to die: to sleep"
release as gesture, which in turn infect the triple, mutilating repetition: "Well, well, well."\(^{87}\)

The "reservoir of chthonic meaning" might be compared to

the defect, the essential deceit, we are trying to define. Without questioning Mr. Cummings, or any poet, as to sincerity (which is a personal attitude, irrelevant to the poetry considered) it is possible to say that when in any poem the important words are forced by their use to remain impenetrable, when they can be made to surrender nothing actually to the senses—then the poem is defective and the poet’s words have so far deceived him as to become ideas merely.\(^{88}\)

Blackmur’s technical mask was a mask indeed, and shows itself so in unresolved contradictions, which are also a measure of hope. He knows what makes the pounding repetition of "flower" objectionable in Cummings, and he knows what richens the words "die" and "sleep" in *Hamlet* into overarching meaningfulness. What, indeed! There is an alchemical tendency in assigning terms like "ideas" and "gesture": another way of putting it would be that one instance of using the tools at the poet’s disposal is somewhat unsuccessful, and another instance is great. Knowledge may result from the discovery of richening, complicating terms for the conditions of failure and success, but hocus-pocus hangs about if one sits down to
write a poem with the sensibility that the terms conceive. "Idea" and "gesture" have "special" meanings themselves, though they have the benefit of appearing more or less concrete in the anagogical structures that the essays build up around them—differently concrete than Hamlet’s soliloquy. What is at the center is not quite, as Donald Davie put it, unutterable, but the exercise of uttering has tragically "special" value for anybody hoping to put it to use. The lady and the tiger are distinguishable. But who is at the door?

Blackmur notes that the reader’s predicament is heightened, too—or perhaps sharpened, by some tragic distance:

most of any poet’s work, with half a dozen exceptions, is tenuous and vague, private exercises or public playthings of a soul in verse. So far as he is able, the reader struggles to reach the concrete, the solid, the definite; he must have these qualities, or their counterparts among the realm of the spirit, before he can understand what he reads. To translate such qualities from the realm of his private experience to the conventional forms of poetry is the problem of the poet; and the problem of the reader, likewise, is to come well equipped with the talent and the taste for discerning the meaning of those conventions as they particularly occur. Neither the poet’s casual language nor the reader’s casual interlocution is likely to be much help. There must be a ground common but exterior to each: that is the poem.
There must be a common ground. Manifest destiny is a profession of faith.

I have digressed because "death" and "dying", for their frequency at the very least, are caught up with Blackmur’s taxonomy of the shapes made by resonance when attached to particular words. "Flower", in Cummings’ choice and particular use, became unsuitable for producing gesture. It is easiest to summarize this as a purely technical argument, about the way a word is put to work, with the content of "flower" used as a garnish, at most a sauce. But consider that Blackmur is fully serious when he writes that the poet must remember "with the Indians" that "the reality of a word is anterior to, and greater than, his use of it can ever be". Then consider that the very issue Cummings is being criticized for is a failure to take stock of the content and history of the words he uses. Then consider that Blackmur might himself take stock of the content and history of the word "flower" as he uses it. Then consider Saint Francis.

If Blackmur means what he says, his reader must pay attention to "flower" as if it referred to a flower, and everything a flower means. It is possible to read the essay without doing so. Here is the summary that Charles Glicksberg gives in his brief biography of Blackmur for American Literary Criticism:

In his first essay, "Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language," he sets out to disprove the romantic theory that the unintelligible—the negation of rational control in composition—is the seat of creative originality. His intent is to show that by discarding intelligence and relying on instinct and immediacy,
the neo-romantic poet simply substitutes one convention for another. Blackmur has no doubt as to which convention is less desirable and nourishing. The true convention makes possible tension, interanimation within an organically unified context, whereas the cult of immediacy produces a surface without depth.91

This way of describing the essay produces a surface of terminology and discourse without depth, and it is remarkable that Blackmur caricatures the imitators of Cummings "who have found it easy to adopt the attitudes from which Mr. Cummings has written", only to be so summarized. Blackmur criticizes the mode of reading that his essay seems to invite or allow, on a level where his audience might apprehend the argument against it very eagerly92. The problem with Cummings is the temptation to so apprehend his surfaces. Blackmur makes his own translation of the method in criticism, and might catch the careless chortling at his barbs while reading in the attitude he mocks. To hold the mirror up to nature is to confront.

My proof only works if it is taken for granted that the quarrel with Cummings could stretch to include both his technique and what he means by it. I should hope that this possibility is opened up by the prose that implicates the "anti-culture" group in Cummings’ methods, the identification of the "anti-intelligence" group with the "phantoms" of experience, and, by contrast, the overarching song of the word in its deep and anterior meanings, which persists. If one is distracted from this sort of insight because the essay looks like an exercise in purely technical critique, the
reader is directed to Blackmur’s statement on Allen Tate’s *Reactionary Essays*, which raises close reading as a kind of Phillips-head screwdriver for the critical mind: handy when it is called for, it should not in normal circumstances surgically replace the hand.

Allen Tate, responding to "Notes on E. E. Cummings’ Language", wrote Blackmur that it was too bad the essay was about Cummings at all: "You have opened a powerful artillery on a jay-bird." Russell Fraser takes this as a measure of Blackmur’s misdirected vitriol, suggestive of a peculiar personal resentment for Cummings, whose family lived in a grand place on upper Irving Street in Cambridge (the good side) while the Blackmurs lived on lower Irving Street, and were obliged to run their home as a boarding house. Given my approach, which is not burdened with the obligations of biography, I would merely note that Tate’s comment also raises the problem of surfaces formed by language, when these become separable from the content at hand. There is a real question of dominance between the artillery and the jay-bird, but it is only a question in poetry.

In addition, Blackmur was an early admirer of Cummings, and during the period when he might have most rankled in circumstance: teenaged Blackmur had few literary prospects, a menial day-job, and vitriol to spare, but his earliest mention of Cummings in a letter to George Anthony Palmer (referring to poems he has lately seen in *The Dial*) gives this:
The one beginning "who’s most afraid of death?" is pretty high class—one, pauses, thinks, the detriment "great" might be applied. I’m unsure; wait six months; I’ll know more then. I hope.95

The one beginning "who's most afraid of death?", is the poem Blackmur later singles out for the inappropriate "scythe takes crisply the whim of thy smoothness"96. It may be remembered that Blackmur says "it would be very difficult for such a crispness to associate itself with death".

Permit me to leap from here into death and flowers without their quotation marks: I no longer mean the words to be dislocated variables, and the only bridge to their meaning from here will be shaky despite preparatory gestures. "Philosophy has the business of bringing back across the threshold of consciousness, back into the story of the whole mind, the reflective power which had thickened into habit," as Blackmur says, and the business is both different than the business of criticism, and what is wanted to buoy the leap.97 The argument I have been addressing might merely be kept in mind while glancing through the famous dialogue from the Phaedo, as the famous dialogue might merely be kept in mind while reading R. P. Blackmur's poems:

"Never mind him," said Socrates. "I wish now to explain to you, my judges, the reason why I think a man who has really spent his life in philosophy is naturally of good courage when he is to die, and has strong hopes that when
he is dead he will attain the greatest blessings in that other land. So I will try to tell you, Simmias, and Cebes, how this would be.

Other people are likely not to be aware that those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead. Now if this is true, it would be absurd to be eager for nothing but this all their lives, and then to be troubled when that came for them which they had all along been eagerly practising."

And Simmias laughed and said, "By Zeus, Socrates, I don't feel much like laughing just now, but you made me laugh. For I think the multitude, if they heard what you just said about the philosophers, would say you were quite right, and our people at home would agree entirely with you that philosophers desire death, and they would add that they know very well that the philosophers deserve it."

"And they would be speaking the truth, Simmias, except in the matter of knowing very well. For they do not know in what way the real philosophers desire death, nor in what way they deserve death, nor what kind of a death it is. Let us then," said he, "speak with one another, paying no further attention to them. Do we think there is such a thing as death?"

"Certainly," replied Simmias.

"We believe, do we not, that death is the separation of the soul from the body, and that the state of being dead is the state in which the body is
separated from the soul and exists alone by itself and the soul is separated from the body and exists alone by itself? Is death anything other than this?"

"No, it is this," said he.

"Now, my friend, see if you agree with me; for, if you do, I think we shall get more light on our subject. Do you think a philosopher would be likely to care much about the so-called pleasures, such as eating and drinking?"

"By no means, Socrates," said Simmias.

"How about the pleasures of love?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, do you think such a man would think much of the other cares of the body—I mean such as the possession of fine clothes and shoes and the other personal adornments? Do you think he would care about them or despise them, except so far as it is necessary to have them?"

"I think the true philosopher would despise them," he replied.

"Altogether, then, you think that such a man would not devote himself to the body, but would, so far as he was able, turn away from the body and concern himself with the soul?"

"Yes."

"To begin with, then, it is clear that in such matters the philosopher, more than other men, separates the soul from communion with the body?"

"It is."
"Now certainly most people think that a man who takes no pleasure and has no part in such things doesn't deserve to live, and that one who cares nothing for the pleasures of the body is about as good as dead."

"That is very true."

One would not want to say that every individual use of the word "die" echoes this, at least not without the help of additional evidence. The word on its own is a bit run down, and most uses would not have any claim on the lineage. Using the word "die" does not echo Socrates any more than it echoes "to die: to sleep"; nor, for that matter, any number of unmemorable, non-literary exclamations of aggression or distress. The first two usages mentioned share the quality of potency in the word's history, and though there are no echoes of them in Blackmur's phraseology, we find something like an echo of their power, or a their symbolism, in the uses that he puts to death and sleep in a sample like this:

I have lain down, enacting emptiness

within a sleep: heaven is empty so,

a sleep without the body's sloth for dress,

without the wakened loss the mind must know;

have risen up, resuming the bright blood,

the pumping heart, still brain, and feasting eye

and am thus sheathed and trapped in solitude:
a separated life that still can die.

How shall I ponder these in the cold stream,
the wordless and unsummoned sense that springs
indifferent beneath all words? Which dream,
humble or proud, shall smoothe these sufferings?

Ah, Lucifer, this is the truest hell,
where death alone shall be impossible.99

In her review of *From Jordan’s Delight*, the collection in which this poem appears, Janet Adam Smith notes that Blackmur’s poems are strikingly devoid of specific allusions to poets or poems. He seems instead, Smith says, to allude to types of poetry: "The Important Poem" haunts Blackmur, and drives him after Milton or Wordsworth into sonnet sequences (and Smith would have it that the drive is mechanical and poorly conceived).100 I think that this feeling in Blackmur’s poems is a result of the weight given to individual words and the pressure they are made to bear. Endless allusiveness could curl in the notion of death, or sleep, and a reading of the poem depends on them tremendously. If Cummings treats the man as sensorium, Blackmur treats the word as sensorium, and believes that precedent rules in his favor. With the assumption that there is special force to common words, the poem suggests one ought treat it with an unusual amount of gravity and high seriousness, without really supplying either. Hence the odor of machinery and the
jibe about the "Important Poem". It is as if Blackmur imagines an audience who will read a word like "die" with a lexicon of its greatest past uses, and then puzzle away to reshape those significances according to his new arrangement, even if the words so conceived must beggar the arrangement. This is not a great poem, but it depends upon what one has absorbed from great poetry. Blackmur works with loci of literary resonance as another poet might work with scientific neologisms, or compound words. But the history of Blackmur's words is the history of sensibility: "die" is always a product of its great uses in symbolic imagination. The Important Poem is his haunt, because it is continually injected on the level of vocabulary.

To a degree this is merely clever: the gesture of the poetry sometimes resembles Blackmur's late oracular essays, which use snippets of texts to generate a small (perhaps bottled) tornado of resonance, between several structures of belief. In the case of the poems, the references are not cited or expanded, and the structures must be imagined: the philosopher's practice of death is brought into relation with Hamlet's proposal "to die: to sleep"; the speaker prefers to die in pride, cannot, and this is raised as an analogue to Satan's exile from heaven; satanic pride in turn draws Milton's hell into the poem, where death is a prominent and defining feature:

Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death,

A universe of death, which God by curse

Created evil, for evil only good,
Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds,

Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,101

The conflict of interest comes late in the poem, but recalls Macbeth, murdering sleep, which Blackmur raises alongside the instance from Hamlet in his essay "Language as Gesture."

Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more

Macbeth does murder sleep!" the innocent sleep.

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,

The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,

Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course.

Chief nourisher in life's feast.

Where Hamlet's play of gesture was towards condensation, a focusing of the gesture into action, a gesture invading the plot of the play itself, in the lines from Macbeth the context only suggests the gesture and provides it a means to invoke an escape from the context of the action, and sets it, in its little freed world of words, to creating other gestures in the last four phrases, which themselves both play upon each other and all backwards upon sleep. Sore labour plays upon hurt minds, and great nature’s second course (meaning a second round or lap in the sense of movement) plays upon the
other sense of *course* in connection with life's feast, and life's feast plays
directly back upon the death of each day's life: itself sleep, which has already
been murdered by Macbeth. What we have here is part prayer and part
imprecation, with gesture invoking its substance: the substance of what is
lacking and cannot, except in the form of prayer, be had.102

This describes the way Blackmur's poem wants to work on the crux of "to die: to
sleep". The "feasting eye" at once appears as one of the nourishers in life's feast, and
the poem comes clear as a reversal of Macbeth's prayer, and his imprecation. But I
do not think one arrives at *Macbeth* unless by way of *Hamlet, Paradise Lost*, and the
*Phaedo*, if not some equivalent trinity: the poem depends upon a jerry-rigged
structure where death is communion with Lady Philosophy, life's distraction from
her is unbearable as exile from paradise, and communion and exile are
complements that may in fact refer to the same experience. If these insights do not
come first, you will not arrive at Dunsinane, nor would you know what to do when
you arrived. But the echoes that make that structure are mostly repetitions of very
common words. The case to be made is in the contrast of nuance, and the poem is
orchestrated by movements of sensibility.

"Death" is an attractive word for this kind of practice because it refers to
something fundamentally inscrutable but common—Blackmur has his call for
common ground outside the experiences of both the reader and the poet. That the
common ground is also the the choice sarcophagus is more a human condition than
a stylistic preference, but he who thinks of death must speculate, and draw in resonances with tinges of faith, philosophy, and images learned from art or dreams—not excluding the horrifying images of murder, decay, and hospitals. This glut of drama does not follow from all words. "Flower", for instance, refers first to an object, not a state, of perceptual reality. One is not in danger of becoming a flower, and flowers are included in one's experience of ordinary living. Death cannot be so experienced: to think of it asks contemplation more than perception, and drives everlastingly away from the created world towards products of the human mind: dogma, metaphor, and abstraction. One is not catching Blackmur out when she notices the prevalence of death in his poems, but completing his gesture. Flowers are not the subject of his poetry. Death is.

Blackmur directs readers to the section a section of commentary on death in his 1934 edition of the critical prefaces, entitled The Art of the Novel. What follows is an excerpt of Henry James's preface to "The Altar of the Dead":

The sense of the state of the dead is but part of the sense of the state of the living; and, congruously with that, life is cheated to almost the same degree of the finest homage (precisely this our possible friendships and intimacies) that we fain would render it. We clutch indeed at some shadow of these things, we stay our yearning with snatches and stop-gaps; but our struggle yields to the other arrayed things that defeat the cultivation, in such an air, of the finer flowers—creatures of cultivation as the finer flowers essentially are.
We perforce fall back, for the application of that process, on the coarser—which form together the rank and showy bloom of "success," of multiplied contact and multiplied motion; the bloom of a myriad many-coloured "relations"—amid which the precious plant becomes rare indeed. "The Altar of the Dead" then commemorates a case of what I have called the individual independent effort to keep it onne the less tended and watered, to cultivate it, as I say, with an exasperated piety.  

Be it exasperated piety or suicidal impulse, death hangs throughout the poems that follow. For a start at its recognition, the reader is directed to "An Elegy for Five", p. 179, and asked to note both the presence of each of the five senses in the five subaltern friends that come to call, and the nature of their dismissal. Blackmur offered a comment on "An Elegy for Five", for the Yale Series of Recorded Poets in 1961:

This poem must represent an almost universal experience of being sick, either in hospital or at home, where your friends feel an obligation to come and see you, are quite convinced that you are going to die, have nothing to say, and you yourself, a sick man, find yourself under the obligation of perpetual hospitality.
At last obscurity, hothouse flower of distrust. Blackmur’s critical statements on this score have laced the proceedings of my remarks so far, and any volume of his essays will furnish additional commentary. What remains is exegesis, in the mathematical sense of drawing the roots from affected equations.

Let us consider the sense of shells. They are protective ("You are in any case among enemies."); they are exoskeletal, and may furnish false images of their contents (the *OED* cites Thomas Carlyle: "mere effigies and shells of men"); and when held to the ear they produce the sound of the sea. A protective shell presupposes that the experience of the creature within the shell is not reflected or indicated by the gloss of his structural mask. The smooth creatures one has eaten, still living, must first be extracted—molluscs that come unclosed are mostly spoiled. The shell protects the frailty of creation, which Blackmur thinks somehow an essential characteristic of works of art, glimpsed in their evanescence, to the tune of Satie’s *Gymnopédies*.105

Some sense of this scheme arises between Blackmur’s notions of "statements" and "esthetic". What follows is on Wallace Stevens:

Holding in his mind as much of Mr. Stevens’ poetry—all thirty-five years of it—as possible, does it not seem that he has always been trying to put down
tremendous statements; to put down those statements heard in dreams? His esthetic, so to speak, was unaware of those statements, and was in fact rather against making statements, and so got in the way. It is rather as if Lucretius had been compelled to write his invocation to Alma Venus in the esthetic of *The Rape of the Lock*.106

I find it surprising that Blackmur makes "esthetic" the correspondent of a shell, and "statement" the correspondent of the interior substance masked and shaped by it. Further, I think there is reason for surprise: the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "statement" as "A formal written or oral account of facts, theories, opinions, events, etc., (now) esp. as requested by authority, or issued to the media." The definition of "esthetic" as I first read it in Blackmur’s essay corresponds to the first sense for "aesthetics" in the *OED*:

The philosophy of the beautiful or art; a system of principles for the appreciation of the beautiful, etc.; the distinctive underlying principles of a work of art or a genre, the works of an artist, the arts of a culture, etc.

I approached the passage with the expectation that aesthetics were underlying principles; statements their overlaid edifice in public form—as if principle preceded speech. But Blackmur suggests a different formulation. The primary activity is called "statement", the first passion of a being crying out, sometimes with a quality called
"authority", "aesthetic" may be conventional, even if the convention is established by the individual distortion of artistic theory as supplied by history or personality—the hard shell. Blackmur uses this formulation habitually. My first example is his description of Pierre de Ronsard’s historical context:

On the side of theory the renaissance aesthetic (as later the reformation and counter-reformation aesthetic) had grown hard and narrow and severely moralistic when it did not become merely technical. Yet in practice the arts had their own strength.\(^\text{107}\)

The second can be taken without a context:

Authority is expressed in conventions, in generalities, in statements. The actual is expressed in details which have been both freed of conventions and released by conventions, and it would be impossible to get the actual into the arts without both operative relations of authority—preparation by and delivery from and in. This is the process sometimes called refreshing conventions; it might better be called the supersession of conventions, or the actual experience of, above, and beyond them.\(^\text{108}\)

Blackmur’s scheme is superior to my assumption because it allows for different kinds of moves: statements may be variously mangled by aesthetic, but may also
have the authority to confront and supplant conventions. The scheme gives personal aesthetic—the identifying features of a writer—a local character, analogous to public conventions of the period. This induces vertigo slightly, but it is no different than the question of literary rôle-playing hitherto discussed, and is part of the argument in favor of traditional verse forms. One of the results is a phenomenon like Stevens, whose aesthetic is at odds with his statements. Another interesting result is a phenomenon like Blackmur, who treats aesthetic and statement as separable elements in the production of a poem, and thinks of himself moving beneath them. To address either case this way would engage in dramatization of a sensibility in order to expand upon insight; a use of the dialectical mode of mind.

Blackmur's invocation to Alma Venus is not written in the esthetic of The Rape of the Lock; it uses something of Yeats. Here is Yeats:

I heard the old, old men say

'Everything alters,

And one by one we drop away.'

They had hands like claws, and their knees

Were twisted like the old thorn trees

By the waters.

I heard the old, old men say

'All that's beautiful drifts away

Like the waters.'
Here, Blackmur’s "Alma Venus":

The old old men, since they have wit
To count no thing entirely done,
No race completely run,
Will pardon me that I should sit
Beating my days out in the sun;
That I should never lift a finger
Nor urge one thought ahead,
Except maybe to linger
Upon some image that might else have fled,
A wind-borne shaft of dust, to join the dead.
They’ll pardon me that I should choose,
For all my laziness,
Out of the images
That contemplative men may use
To dramatize their reveries,
That of a noble woman in her ease.\textsuperscript{110}

This is embarrassing, nudges plagiarism, when it is used in close proximity to
Her flesh has been long trodden, like that ground
Where the world’s playboy and the world’s fool,
Where Socrates and Hercules
Tramped smooth the narrow pound.

This is the mode in which Blackmur might be called a slavish imitator.

Yet there is activity within the reference. Blackmur could assume that his audience would recognize the lines from Yeats, and that the close echoes would raise eyebrows and accusation. Consider that criticism can use quotation without such anxieties; and that certain poets, long dead poets, can be savaged at will. One might expect Blackmur to follow these twinned conventions. Instead, he notices that they are conventional: nostalgic for antiquity like the old, old men in Yeats’s poem, obsessed with the flow of time and the dissolution of beauty.

Blackmur’s lines seem forcefully versified, as if his laziness about his own lines of poetry were meant as a snub to some authority. How can we pretend that he is not aware of the insolent tone that hangs around his imitation? He offers a line with a very strong echo of Yeats, then shrugs at it for half a dozen lines, half-bragging about laziness and his unwillingness to supply his own images, never lifting a finger or urging a thought. We could forgive the echo, but Blackmur both highlights it and refuses to transform it. When one wants to accuse a poet of plagiarism or slavish imitation, his identity comes very close to that of the speaker
of the poem. So Blackmur permits his reader to characterize that sloth in his person: this is a shell, and a hard one.

But the textural conflict, laziness overlaid with the distrust it breeds, makes the poem very different from something by Yeats: there is an irritation at the center, an anxiety over the echoes, over whether or not the poem has its own validity, particularly with wooden lines clunking past. One is made to squirm slightly, in the part that assesses the value, but engaging in a value judgment would bring the reader very close to "the old old men" (different from the "old, old men"), who seem to sit in judgment. "I have this to say, if I can say it." begins Blackmur's long poem "Before Sentence is Passed", which addresses a group of "gentlemen"—judges—and is much closer in tone to this poem than anything by Yeats.\footnote{111} It irritates the critical faculty, but insists, in so many words, that there is activity at the center, a statement, that will be worth hearing if bad manners can be allowed as part of what is to be said.

"I have this to say, if I can say it": read casually, the sense of "say" is slightly different in each use. What is had to say might not be said for various reasons; life supplies examples. But there is more toughness in the line if we unpack the common phrase: if the speaker cannot "say it", then the failure to say reflects on the first clause: if you cannot say something, it is not something you have to say. You have it for some other purpose perhaps, or—worse—you do not really have it at all. The exoskeletal version of thought proves thought. Utterance is a test of principles; but naturally the trial is more dramatic than the verdict.
"Alma Venus" is not really a slavish imitation, so long as the mistrust and uneasiness in the reading are taken as part of its function, part of the court-room drama, rather than treated as blank references meant to make Blackmur seem better than he is: the borrowing’s occurrence ought not to be emphasized above the nature of the borrowing. The speaker frankly asserts the value of lingering upon images rather than making his own, and there is a kind of turn on the two short, unrhymed lines "For all my laziness, / Out of the images": theft suddenly pops into focus as theft, and is stretched with the force of the generalization of "the images": they are presented as a common property of the world, like the library or the trees. Contemplative men are always drawing on "the images", which are not their own, in one way or another; and if one recognizes something in these lines, he will probably identify himself as a contemplative man, or at least acknowledge that he is being invited to commiserate.

The old old men will pardon me
That I have, breathing in my mind
And stretched like flesh upon my nerves,
The one life older than all history,
Older than any dust they find
Cluttering Egypt’s infancy
Or Greece’s full age, or Rome declined,
The oldest goddess that an old man serves.
Venus is then described: a bit run-down, without "that beauty in her eyes / A common woman might have earned / Out of such seasons in love's school;" —she is not Yeats’ Crazy Jane, as we might have imagined she would be: she is a separate entity, and the way she has worn is described only in the negative (she is not like this and not like the other) before another echo of Yeats arises with the "narrow pound".112

Looking at her grave nakedness it seems
Her flesh has been long trodden, like that ground
Where the world’s playboy and the world’s fool,
Where Socrates and Hercules
Tramped smooth the narrow pound.

Lucretius's invocation of Alma Venus sings her as desire, the great cause of activity and growth. Blackmur uses her image in a poem filled with near-plagiarisms. He wants to stretch the image for another use. But the stretch uses its references to Yeats, the surprise of naked imitation, and its classical analogue—all of these things participate in the gesture.

Yeats was a great advocate of "walking naked", and Alma Venus, walked upon naked, turns focus from the dancer to the dance. Do issues of originality pale when the body of experience itself is to be praised? If the goddess, not the poet, is wise
and essential, authorship has different value to the speaker: the same is true when a
collection to a wildly different literary culture is called up. The "old old men"
would pardon Blackmur for borrowing from a living poet if they acknowledged that
contemporaries were worth so referencing and using, in the twentieth century as in
antiquity, when it was a well-established convention for works of literature to be
referred to with their opening words.¹¹³ There is a present evanescent beauty, as
well as the ancient one passing with the waters, available for reference and use:
another way of saying that the trodden-on, over-used Alma Venus is still the
powerful collection of all history.

So if the old old men forgive me
I'll say she is more powerful
And far more wise
Than any Socrates and Hercules.
I think maybe there stir
In her most muscular broad thighs
All men that ever were.

"Alma Venus" is somewhat impertinent, but the poem is also consciously
classical. The impertinence is a result of imposing practices of one context onto the
expectations of another, both in terms of reference and in terms of versification:
Blackmur's clunky verses are the result of using Greek metrics to organize
statements that approach conversational English—that could be read like Greek poetry or American prose (for a start, note that the stanza just quoted works as a sentence without its line endings). But all this shades into praise of a tradition (poetry, and Alma Venus) that is bigger than a century, the century of its origin included. Blackmur often uses bad, nondescript phrases to denote paralysis before something great: the final lines of "Alma Venus" are as fine an example as any. His "Effigy" is a poem of the same period, and ends with

A man most anxious for eternity
Lifting an awkward, naked face.\textsuperscript{114}

The "awkward, naked face" is a favorite for confronting eternity in Blackmurian diction: by turns irksome and praiseful—like his criticism. Eternity is seen by awkward misdirections, often with the help of other poets, and Blackmur takes it as his task to record the glimpses without romanticizing. He is notably naked, and flush, when he takes off his rubber Yeats.

There is always drama, or architecture—some sort of shaping—in a reader's relationship to the poetry he likes.\textsuperscript{115} T. S. Eliot said on the subject:

Even when two persons of taste like the same poetry, this poetry will be arranged in their minds in slightly different patterns; our individual taste in poetry bears the indelible traces of our individual lives with all their
experience pleasureable and painful. We are apt either to shape a theory to cover the poetry that we find most moving, or—what is less excusable—to choose the poetry which illustrates the theory we want to hold. You do not find Matthew Arnold quoting Rochester or Sedley.¹¹⁶

In his poems, R. P. Blackmur often shapes his relationship to certain poetry with an eye to the shape, or the pattern, that is being made. This he presents. And for what it is worth, you do find R. P. Blackmur quoting Sedley:

Ah, Sedley, you were something sweet: "Love still
Has something of the sea;" and life, perhaps,
Has something silent in it, growing ill,
The frail and aching place of the great gaps.
First love was one, my first friend lost another
(By jealous trust), and then the canyon cut
Between one moment and its nearest brother
Cut so to death's gulf yawning in the gut.

Oh, something sweet: "From whence his mother rose."
In silence as the after seas die-down
Love falls away, and death, and my own pose,
And no gaps showing where I saw them drown.
Now wind’s asea, the first sea-star is bright,
Look there for Venus, far in years of light.117

Quotation is brought in to illustrate perhaps, but not to illustrate a theory that Blackmur wants to hold. If it is an illustration, it is a sea-scape: a shell held to the ear and echoing. Here, as he does not with Yeats, Blackmur uses quotation marks, and attribution, as if he were quoting the lines in the newspaper. This is clunky for the purpose, but makes the lines by Sedley float like foam or timber over the lines by Blackmur. "There are some poets where everything is allowed for the sake of isolated effects," Blackmur wrote, "Sedley is perhaps the supreme example in English; there is nothing in him but two lines, but these are famous and will always be worth saving."118 The two lines he wanted to save are easy enough to guess in this context, with their life-preservers on.

Yet re-statement, while preserving the past, also deadens the language of the poet at work. Blackmur supposed that poems that are records of the sensibility deserve a place beside "verse truly alive", and it might be remembered that the dead take various places near the living. The poem becomes a structure of echoes rather than a speaking voice. To be more accurate, it emphasizes the sense of being the former: for Blackmur, even individual words behave like echo chambers. Statement was a force inherent in language; the speaker, its mask and obstacle. Hence what is true of the poems with quotation, and the ways in which they use reference to other poetry, will be true on another level of the poems that do not use quotation at all:
Blackmur is always working with borrowed materials, and deadening himself, or at least his aesthetic—his shell.

A functional bridge between the types of borrowing is provided by the opening section of "From Jordan’s Delight", which uses something like characterization:

What is that island, say you, stark and black—
A Cythera in northern exile? sung
Only by sailors on the darkward tack
Or till the channel buoy give safety tongue?

Here is no Eldorado on the wane:
New Sirens draw us in, in silent seine.

There is something like speech in this first stanza. Whose? "What is that island, say you, stark and black—": a first reading of the line might give a generic sailorly dialect, see a scene on a stormy shore or the deck of a ship, with one old salt addressing another. On a second reading, with less dependence on the imagined scene and more focus on the statement itself, it is ambiguous and could be in the second person, as in "You ask what that nasty black island is." This is only a stretch if you wish to ignore the other syntactical ambiguity in the stanza—a speaker who simultaneously asks and answers his own questions—because nonsense and false-fronted questions are acceptable when the speaker is imagined as a rustic whose
speech habits can be read as mere atmosphere. More accurately perhaps, he questions persistently until ignorance improves, into an obscurity that has a shape like knowledge.

This principle recoils upon the question in Blackmur’s short imagist poem "The Eternal prayer", and its contrast to T. E. Hulme's "Autumn". In this case in "From Jordan's Delight" contrast could not be drawn so easily because the techniques are ingrown: the speaker is a function of the suggested image, and both a producer and a product of its obscurity. What is important is not the obscurity, but the sculptor's procedure of shaping ignorance into a form as concrete as information. To supply someone else's speech grants credence to insight, as Herman Melville figured out when he supplied an Ishmael, and as every writer of critical essays knows. R. P. Blackmur was preoccupied with placing ignorance in the pantheon of critical tools—he planned to bring out a book of criticism titled *A Primer of Ignorance*—but the rusticated tone of the speaker in "Redwing", like the abstraction of sensibility into subject matter for poetry, is a more subtle development of this principle than the use of the term. The vague, stormy sea scene that persists in "From Jordan's Delight" without much discernible action becomes monotonous unless the shapes of statements, like a sea chanty in a storm, are allowed to give rhythm and boundary to the work performed. The point is not what transpires, but the way certain speech acts—stories, talk, nonsense, song, description, and what have you—can be brought to bear on chaos, and give it definition (what is meant by *performance*). In his criticism, Blackmur is at pains to
describe how others’ writing performs. And crucially, his own poetry is not only a performance, but a sober attempt to dramatize the process in the middle of things (what is meant by *in medias res*).

The succession of questions in the stanza mimics the kinds of questions involved in approaching the poem, and call-and-response frets the imagist procedure. "What is that island, say you, stark and black—" What indeed! We return to the problem of naming phenomena of sensibility, and place names serve the purpose better than critic's terms, in a sense, because of their opacity, and their division in medium from what they describe. "A place name," Blackmur wrote, "that is to say a word meaning itself entirely," and it may be noticed of the place names he uses that they define another place, a new and unknown place, only by negative capability. What is that nasty black island? Well, it isn't exactly Cythera, and it isn't El Dorado, either. Both of these places have imaginary components—the first from a myth inscribed on an existent island, the second on an imagined city—and this set of coordinates supplies an orientation. The interrelation of place and imagination is different in this case (a case, perhaps, is always a different case) but we are slightly closer to Cythera, or know our position because of exile from there.

Jordan’s Delight is a real place, an island off the coast of Harrington, Maine, near the family summer house of Blackmur's wife, Helen Dickson, where Blackmur and Helen retreated for several months each year for the duration of their marriage. The island corresponds to the barren scenery that pervades even Blackmur’s earliest poems by a stroke of what may be called good fortune, charging the poetry
with more relationship to the world than Blackmur might have anticipated when he penned his earliest poems about rocky cliff-faces in sea-storm. Blackmur gave a comment on "From Jordan's Delight" in 1961:

> It's perhaps worth saying that Jordan's Delight is the name of an actual island and that I have attempted to delineate what that island looks like in one part or another of various of the group of poems under that title. It is an island, as I have said: mostly cliff, all the woods have long since been washed off it, there are hawks' nests, eagles' nests, and there is a 50-billion-dollar natural rock garden growing on the easterly and north-easterly ends of the island.¹¹⁹

Principles of selection apply to the choice of imagery, but correspondence with reality conceals them, and gives them at least the conceit of photography: when the chief task is description of the scenery, the chief task is not expression of the artist's feelings, except by selection and the manner of statement. The exceptions are doing a lot of the work. It ought to be remembered that Blackmur's Maine is also Maine during the Great Depression, when rural American life had more than its picturesque elements, and the rustic speakers, were they gleaned from life, would have had the violence of people trying to survive bad times. Tessa (or Therese) Gilbert—a friend of Helen's and an old flame of Richard's—was a guest at the Harrington place during several summers in the 'thirties, and reported to Arthur C. Inman on her time there on returning to Boston in August, 1931:
Conditions are frightful in Maine. Everybody steals from everybody else. There isn’t any work. A man may wake up in the morning and find that somebody has stolen his entire flock of chickens during the night. A man killed a bull and sold the meat for a cent a pound. When the owner found out who’d killed it, he demanded a dollar a pound from the thief. The thief couldn’t pay it. The man couldn't collect it. So nobody did anything. The state sent a steam shovel to Steuben to help fix the state highway. It could do the work of thirteen men. The natives were indignant. They planted dynamite under the digger and blew it up. Nobody would let on who’d been responsible. The state sent another shovel. They blew that up, too. Oh, we had a great time this summer. One man killed a woman’s husband and kept on living with the woman and only got one year for it because the jury wouldn’t convict him of anything except adultery.  

This circus of half-collapsed society is not present in *From Jordan’s Delight*, and the feeling of it only arises later, in the uncollected "Mr. Virtue and the Three Bears", which takes off from an note in the Bangor *Daily News* that Blackmur has remembered for fifteen years, reporting that a Mr. Virtue, gas-station owner, has lately been eaten by his bear. The anecdote could easily slide in among Tessa’s stories about Maine; not so easily among Blackmur’s sea poems.
Restriction curries legerdemain. To choose a single dominating image, and adhere to it as scrupulously as Blackmur does, precludes sequences that use the desert, the river, the city, and the sea in quick succession to make a point about a feeling that includes them all. The coherence, in such a case, is the witnessing eye: the self looking out at the world, and synthesizing its diversity. In "From Jordan's Delight", resources are reduced. There is the island, and there is what Blackmur called the "the toughness of an essentially metaphysical outlook"; c'est tout. Yet the products are various, and include:

Here under Jordan's seamost ledge  
On splintered shale and chowdered sand  
Always it is gulf’s dragging edge  
Where we await highwater stand.

Here all the tides of Sirens climb,  
Borne upwards from the settling waves,  
Borne upwards and over and back,  
From spring to neap, and each its slack.

How sing they of our washing graves,  
How lift and draw us in, how heave  
And buoying snare us in heaven's seine,
Who in our dying parts still climb,
And falling strand our living gain.

The rising and falling, lag and retrieve,
Sun heave and withdrawing,
Moon lift and imploring,
The spring of hours and neap of time,
The drift, the range, spindrift, the soaring:
What bench-mark harks the ever change?

What the imagists did for images, Blackmur is trying to do with statements. A bench-mark appears, of the degree to which one depends upon images, when it is difficult to imagine what this analogy means without thinking of statements diagrammed, so as to notice the somersaults when a phrase turns back on itself and, like a wave, breaks. The first stanza of the example, for example, only approaches and never arrives at what is the object of the statement, which retreats with the dragging edge of what we must suppose is the edge we face, of the sea. Read this way, R. P. Blackmur’s poems do show a remarkable control of imagery—but his art is more like painting in the dark, with necessarily broad strokes, than a projection of successive images on a screen. If you await the indication of a common or obsessive image or emotion to be called up in your mind while reading From Jordan’s Delight, you will wait indefinitely. But focus the mind on the force of words as they are used
for sense—developing a sensual feeling for syntax—and images begin to come. There is a constant urge to slip back into reading for symbolist imagery, ignoring the kind of picture Blackmur actually provides. But this slippage mimics the difficulty of enlivening the sensibility, to which alone these movements are made visible: the poem transpires for the reader only if she lets go of the ledge of conventional contruction during the active pursuit of discursive sense. "Society takes on the aspect of uniform motion," Blackmur wrote, "The artist is the hero who struggles against uniform motion, a struggle in marmalade," and Blackmur shapes his poetry against conventional reading, perhaps to mimic that struggle, and that marmalade. The sense of the poems is in a movement under and through them. Lonely in words, but under words at home.

My claims are too many and too rich without the salt of example, but syntactical play pervades "From Jordan's Delight", and perhaps it is best to see for oneself what can be made of the poem, perhaps with the aid of a dictionary, which like faith is the substance of things hoped for. I will limit myself to the sample above, from the tenth section, "All Sirens' Seine", which includes several different shapes. The first stanza: the retreat of the object. The second stanza: the tides are borne and climb upwards to "here", but the sense of place dissolves as the waves move in several directions, with each direction somehow driving at arrival "here", in the same sense that each wave is its own slack. The third stanza: the ambiguity of the word "how" and the anticipation of a question that does not come, which can also be applied to the word "who", and the quest for an answer to either question may
"strand our living gain." The fourth stanza: the equation of verbs in their continuous active form to nouns; where simple action passes insensibly into a process, the way "writing" has, and the notion of "the ever-change" that supplies the transformation. And so on, the instances, continuing.

Play with the sense of statements is certainly not unique to R. P. Blackmur, and William Empson gave several very fine examples of the phenomenon in his _Seven Types of Ambiguity_. What is peculiar in Blackmur is not ambiguity, but the way his poetry insistently uses what might be called ambiguity as a medium, more than a mode. His art is like cave painting, not because he mimics primitive simplicity, but because he wants to use phenomena of mind where his capabilities are quite primitive: Blackmur paints with intelligibility and its opposites as if they were colors; he is using thought to create images, but the matter of his thought can be quite removed from the shape he makes, as the substance of pigment can be quite removed from the subject of a painting. Blackmur uses the analytical function in his poetry, but unlike William Empson he does not use his puzzle-poems to set dozens of plates spinning for arrival at a perfect image for philosophical abstraction, or even a perfectly synthesized emotion. Blackmur is perverse, and in love with the place of discontent and difficulty: hoping to sing it, he will not make his puzzle into anything that resembles a toy or game, and he will not allow the world's details anywhere near the poetry, except perhaps in nautical terminology, that is related by analogy to the adventure in technical structures where his focus hangs. Blackmur sings and replicates in miniature, the "bleak" and "gallant" quality that faces (both
by looking at and giving a face to) knowledge, as knowledge forms a shell for chaos: the rocks, the flux, the sea-storm, and the nasty black island, which is what it always was.

In connection with this, it is possible to trace an evolution in the themes of R. P. Blackmur's poetry, from the "private" poems of the 1930s to the "public" themes in his last volume of poems, The Good European. But while the surface changes, Blackmur’s techniques for dealing with politics are very similar to the techniques used to describe the sea.

THE COMMUNIQUÉS FROM YALTA

Not heart, not soul, and not their joined intent,
not these alone, but the whole process, breaking;
these are not salvo sounds, but fire raking
all hope, all memory, all undertaking.

—Who mocks the mockers when mockery is spent?
When will this dry tree I clutch be done shaking?

[Luke xxiii, 31]
Again a play of syntax, with the provision of both subject and object of the statement withheld—and when provided, unsatisfactorily provided by two metaphors for gunfire that seem to refer to nothing but the worse vagaries in "all hope, all memory, all undertaking"—except "undertaking" after gunfire also smells of death, which is the only image left, ghostlike, after the stanza ends. The sentence turns over on itself, concludes the way a wave might conclude, and recedes: this is syntactically reminiscent of parts of "From Jordan’s Delight", though the ostensible theme is more "public", and has changed.

But it does not diminish the poems to notice their similarity: metonymy is a powerful communicative tool, as even certain conventions in children's jokes express. Here is an example, in a Blackmurian mode, which is not a quotation from anywhere, but indented only for style, and possible ghosts:

Q. Why was the Yalta conference like the sea?

A. Ask a haunted man what is a haunt.

IV

you set up in a new business
John Crowe Ransom noticed the provisional nature of Blackmur’s statements in criticism, and wondered about them. "The poem", in what follows, is not a particular poem but refers to the generality, The Poem.

I want to know if the passion which Blackmur receives from the poem is engendered in the legerdemain of the poetic technique, and did not simply come over from the original human situation with the objects to which it has been attached all along. Is it born of humanism or aestheticism? Perhaps in the human situation it was a great passion but a despairing one, thinking it might be vain; whereas in the poem it is exhibited so firmly and with such a perfect propriety that it becomes confirmed, and confident; I do not know. Now Blackmur escapes from the jargon of technique as well as any man can who talks about it. But it is remarkable how technical all his studies are; the poems are examined along linguistic lines, procedural lines, strategical lines; whatever may be the gravity of the content. There is no ideological emphasis; the social or religious ideas are looked at shrewdly, but they are appraised for their function within the work; even though they may be ideas from which, at the very moment, out in the world of action, the issues of life and death are hung.124

This participates in the briefer statement that Ransom gives later in the same review:
No faith, no passion of any kind, is originated in a poem; it is brought into the poem by the technical process of "imitating" life (to use Aristotle's term); it is the fact which is the heart of the fiction.¹²⁵

For Ransom, what Blackmur was about in Language as Gesture was too much like setting up in a different business—no longer mimetic, but meddlesome. By asking that even faith and ideology be treated as provisional tools, usable principles, was Blackmur not making an untenable claim for poetry, and dramatically severing the relations to the real world occasions that gave it richness and meaning? Abandoning that relation, for Ransom, was an abandonment of the core of literary practice: subordinating the real world to the imagination destabilizes both under false pretenses. Worse still, Blackmur's procedures could be construed treacherous: by putting forth ideology as a conditional state to be analysed the way a verse technique is analysed, for effectiveness in making poetry, Blackmur was undercutting the world of action that enabled poetry—and further, poets—to live.

This critique reflects itself in Blackmur's poems as they have been discussed so far, and in the critical statements that Blackmur used for describing Christianity in T. S. Eliot's poems, or magic in the poetry of W. B. Yeats. Blackmur's poems are preoccupied with the drama of searching for adequate values and failing to achieve them; the poems are not themselves enriched by values, and so rely on an unstable mass of echoes to supply the force of traditions without a tradition's unified
imperative. Their savor, for this, runs dry: what is forceful and absolute (even the statement itself) is considered as a property of words and their possibility, never a property of the world as it is newly described. Faith and passion are not brought into the poem or given form in the language, but assumed dead. Their ghosts, in words and quotations, are brought into evanescent relationships, small masques for the shades of passionate thought, that fall flat if the reader cannot supply an imaginary structure of their value, that must be outside both the poem and its present circumstance. The poems become difficult, and their rewards are somewhat thin: the masques savor of thought exercises, and fade as the leaf turns.

Yet there are advantages to a mind like Blackmur's in the "world of action" of which Ransom notes his neglect. For one thing, his was a mind to see the worth of multiple value systems, and able to support the churn of activity for reasons other than adherence to his personal religious or political point of view. In 1944, while already installed at Princeton, and following a similar assignment given to his friend, the Harvard poet Grant Code, Blackmur completed a survey of American literary magazines for the Rockefeller Foundation[^126]. Blackmur's friend from Cambridge days, John Marshall, had risen to the position of Comptroller in the Humanities Division of the foundation, and the impetus behind the study was Blackmur's: the project was one of the results of a letter taken to Marshall when the *Kenyon Review* was in danger of dissolution for lack of funds. The letter is dated January 22, 1941. Blackmur writes:
I have been asked to put a bee in your bonnet, which is this. The Kenyon Review is nearing the end of the Carnegie grant which has been sustaining it, and unless some foundation steps forward, will expire with the summer number. If such things lie within your business, I wish you would look over a few numbers of it. If you like, I can have a file sent to you. I think you would agree with me that it is good, should live, and deserves support; also that it has been improving vastly. I don't mean by any of this to suggest that you, personally or officially, have any natural connection with the support of literary magazines. I mean only to fire a shot in the dark; if there was a target hit, good; if not, not.127

Marshall replied the following day:

Dear Dick:

I have your letter of January 22nd where you speak of the financial needs of the Kenyon Review. I have seen a number of it occasionally and am in general familiar with its quality. But I am afraid, so far as help from the Foundation is concerned, that is not in question, since we seldom if ever can consider support for a magazine. In fact, we are hardly ever able to consider help in publishing at all. Certainly there would be no chance of our considering help for a magazine of this type no matter how meritorious.
I certainly will get in touch with you when I am next out at Princeton.

In the meantime, do let me know when you could come up for a night. We would be delighted to have you.

With best wishes to you both,

Yours as ever,

JOHN MARSHALL

By March of 1944, the Rockefeller foundation had approved a Grant in Aid in the amount of $7,500 "to Kenyon College as emergency aid to the work of Professor John Crowe Ransom and the Kenyon Review." Included with the additional information supplied on the grant document is record of Blackmur's engagement for the literary magazine study:

In discussions leading up to the Foundation's assistance to the Kenyon Review, it was agreed that other similar grants to the so-called "literary magazines" might well be in order. In considering this possibility DHS [David H. Stevens, Director of the Humanities division] and JM [John Marshall] have sought the advice of Mr. R. P. Blackmur, of Princeton University. Mr. Blackmur was formerly editor of the "Hound and Horn", one of the leading magazines of this type published during the late twenties and early thirties.
His own interest in the functions, finance, and administration of them, has led him to assemble materials on this and other phases of their activities. In a recent conversation with Mr. Blackmur, he stated that it would be possible for him to draw this material together into a report which would provide the officers with the necessary background for considering assistance to other journals now being published. The recommendation is for a grant in aid of $275, of which $250 shall be an honorarium for the preparation of the report and $25 or as much as may be needed for secretarial assistance and supplies.129

Blackmur completed the report in the fall of 1944. This was not the end of the magazine funding, but the beginning of a broader initiative. The discussions that led to its arrangement to not survive in the Rockefeller Foundation archives, but in October of 1946 out went a flurry of letters, all of them copies of this one to W. H. Auden:

October 25, 1946

Dear Auden:

For reasons that will later become apparent, we should be very grateful for your best opinion as to what literary magazines now being
published in the United States are of the most use to literature. The sort of magazines we have in mind are those of the various types represented by Kenyon Review, Poetry, Partisan Review, Accent, Sewanee Review and others that will doubtless occur to you - and we hope you will name what seem to you the best of them. On the safe assumption that literary magazines like these always need money and that their contributors are always paid too little, if at all, the object of our question is, first, to take advice as to what existing magazines most deserve such help and, on their record, why; and second, to devise methods of obtaining and distributing such help.

If you have read Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich’s "The Little Magazines," you will have fresh in mind the general precarious picture of the magazine and their contributors over the last forty years, and at the same time their great use to literature. It is that which we most want you to define with respect to the magazines which at present interest you. Beyond that, please choose your own terms for your answers. It would, however, be hard to avoid such topics as, for example:

- Introduction of new writers;
- Support of talented writers, young and older;
- Maintaining of critical standards;
- Interest in the other arts and in society.
But these topics are merely suggestive.

Finally, though we do not wish to hurry you, we do hope that the question itself will, so to speak, precipitate an answer. Our interest in what you may have to say could not be more serious or more immediate. In short, we are writing to you in the belief that, with your aid, genuine action might shortly become possible toward the consistent support of several literary magazines. Certainly any effort, not plainly futile, is worth making.

Sincerely yours,

Lionel Trilling
Malcolm Cowley
R. P. Blackmur

Blackmur, Cowley and Trilling were to discuss the responses, and report on them to the foundation officers. Letters went out to Eric Bentley, Louise Bogan, Van Wyck Brooks, Kenneth Burke, Granville Hicks, F. T. Hoffman, Alfred Kazin, Randall Jarrell, F. O. Matthiessen, George Mayberry, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, William Carlos Williams, Edmund Wilson, Yvor Winters, and Morton Dauwen Zabel. The replies range in tone from delighted compliance (most
notably from Kazin), to detailed scoffing at the three critics and their mysterious scheme and its unsavory suggestiveness. The most notable letter of this genre is from Wallace Stevens.

November 4, 1946

Dear Mr. Blackmur:

Perhaps your triumvirate would be interested in the attached statement of *Poetry* which has just come in. If it costs $14,194.02 annually, or $1162.00+ monthly, to publish *Poetry* and if *Poetry* pays its contributors $2406.75 annually, or $200.00+ monthly, it is not hard to see how much money is involved in your scheme, whatever it may be. Anyone interested in endowing *Poetry* would find it necessary, on the basis of these figures, to put up $700,000.00 at 2%. But if *Poetry* should want to double the amount paid by it to its contributors and its staff ($2406.75 + $2953.33), this would require, roughly, another $300,000. So that *Poetry* as the beneficiary of a trust fund would require something like $1,000,000.00 to carry on. It could then do without its guarantors and lecture series. It would still have its income of $7477.62 from sales, etc. with which to support talented writers, which would be very little. Even with all this, *Poetry* would be a modest establishment. But no-one would write for it any longer for love. The *New*
Republic would discover that it was the tool of the luxurious. Everyone would expect poets to buy the drinks, and so on.

Multiply this by the requirements of the Kenyon Review, which are probably greater, and of each of the others named by you, and it is clear enough that an adequate endowment of merely the better existing magazines would run into something fantastic. A lot of new things now suppressed might be looked for and would talk about the privileged few, the social duties of the trustees, etc. A man with any money at all is beset with other people's plans for spending it. Certainly I should not be willing to try to help you slug anyone. If you are thinking of the government, it would look like just so much more boondoggling. Besides, the government is already supporting lots of talented writers, and that wouldn't help.

If the thing is looked at as more suitable for an annual levy than for an endowment, this still will involve a lot of money. If Poetry costs $14,000.00 annually and if you add to that sum the costs of the Kenyon Review, Sewanee Review, Partisan Review, Accent, Chimera, Quarterly Review, Foreground, and local things, like the Virginia Quarterly, the Rocky Mountain Review, the really interesting Arizona Quarterly, you will need a lot of money. While you may not have quite as much as $100,000.00, still that is what it would come to. Everyone whom you asked to contribute would know in advance that the universal practice in the administration of chests is to specialists in a group
of donors. Who is going to contribute on such a scale to such a project? What special claims have literary men on such preference?

The problem of the literary magazine is just as much the problem of other magazines no less valuable. In a recent number of the Journal of Aesthetics the editors said that the Journal is unable to send even authors free copies. Many of the papers published in this Journal would do very well in a strictly literary magazine. There must be many learned magazines in equal difficulty: and many not so learned. Thus the Musical Quarterly is supported by the Schirmers; the Gazette des Beaux Arts by the Wildensteins; Cuadernos Americanos, far better than anything published here, emerges with quality and elegance and regularity from the poverty of Mexico City; Origenes, never sure of its next number, is the work of a loyal group in Havana.

This brings me round to the remark that it is certain that nothing worth while can be done without the use of a very large sum of money, and, yet, that it is by no means sure that anything whatever can be done even with the use of such an amount of money: something equal to the Guggenheim fund: some fund that would make grants to magazines instead of to individuals. If that is what you have in mind, it is a handsome idea. But like most handsome ideas, it could stand a lot of analysing. For my own part, I regard the creating of an endowment or the collecting of a chest as impractical. They are dependent upon finding one or a group of people
willing to contribute money on a scale comparable to the contributions to museums, etc. If you know of potential contributors on any such scale to such a chest, you don’t need any help from me. Personally I know of no-one.

I said a moment ago that it was by no means certain that the use of a lot of money would do anything to advance literature. You have not disclosed the nature of the scheme you have in mind so that I ought not to say such a thing. For that matter, you have not told me what you are thinking of making of anything that I might say. I think I could talk about this for a long time to come. But let me wind the thing up for the present by saying that the objects in the attic of life never seemed dearer to me than now when I see the three of you approaching them with pots of gilding. I hope you won’t think that I am not interested. Personally, I have a horror of the sort of thing that is done for money. That is about all there is nowadays. It has nothing whatever to do with what means anything to me nor, I believe, to you and to the other two men who signed your letter.

Sincerely yours,

Wallace Stevens

Stevens’ complaints have been reprised on a large scale in the twenty-first century, with shock over the activities of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, insofar as it partnered with the Central Intelligence Agency to supply funding for literary
magazines and other cultural institutions during the Cold War by covert
disbursement through various foundations.\textsuperscript{132} The Rockefeller Foundation was an
instrumental arm of such activities, and R. P. Blackmur appears to have been near
the center of their literary project, due in large part to his friendship with John
Marshall, Associate Director of Humanities. The Inter-Office report on the proposal
to aid literary magazines was not written by Blackmur, but it shows his influence
strongly, cemented in what became the institutional language of the literary
magazine project:

The present proposal for aid to American literary magazines rests on a kind
of "theory," as to how an agency like the RF [Rockefeller Foundation] can
encourage growth in contemporary literature.

(1) Growth in literature is, fundamentally, growth in sensibility, first on
the part of writers, and, by the appreciation of their work, in the minds of
their readers. Such growth in sensibility is evident throughout the history of
literature: it occurs as writers become aware of aspects of experience which
their predecessors have not sufficiently treated, and discover ways of
treating that experience which makes its significance appreciable for other
writers and for readers of their time. This phenomenon in literary history has
been most striking when it took the form of "revolt" from a prevailing
tradition - one such occurrence being the revolt form the "classical" tradition
of the eighteenth century on the part of the "romantic" poets who began to
publish at the century's end. Such "revolts" are, however, only striking
instances of a constant process of growth in literature, which in its less
dramatic forms merely reflects an extension in the sensibility of this or that
writer, or group of writers. Such a less dramatic instance is now well
recognized in what the writers of the French existentialist group drew from
American writers of the inter-war period, notably, in their estimation, from
Faulkner. In short, in its constant operation the process may be one of
extension rather than the more striking occurrence of "revolt."

(2) Growth in sensibility is in the first instance primarily a concern of
writers and critics. Indeed, in its first phases, it can hardly concern - or
interest - a larger audience. More often than not, in fact, its first, tentative
manifestations are almost inappreciable for a larger audience. To support
this view, one has only to recall the first reviews of the work of writers of the
British romantic school; or more recently the first reception in this country of
the work of such now recognized poets as Amy Lowell or E. E. Cummings.
Until the first, tentative manifestations of an advance have been succeeded
by more mature and appreciable manifestations, work embodying growth
seldom gains any considerable audience to which it does not seem
incomprehensible, bizarre, and utterly eccentric.
(3) In this respect the process of literary growth is so clear that, even if it cannot be precisely identified at any given moment, its manifestations can be located with reasonable certainty. In general those manifestations take the form of creative or critical work that writers and critics read with an interest, and even an excitement, which others may find hard to explain, or even they themselves to justify.

(4) This material finds its small but proper audience in various ways, often, and in the United States almost exclusively, in the literary magazines. (If there were any doubt as to that fact in the United States, it should be completely dispelled by the analysis of Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich in their book entitled The Little Magazine: Princeton University Press, 1946.) Indeed, it almost necessarily follows that, in the United States, those involved in literary advance, as contrasted with writers of already established reputation, are those who write for and read these magazines. To put it the other way round, they are virtually the only vehicles for publishing work which does not in most respects correspond with what publishers and editors believe to be acceptable to a larger audience.

(5) For an agency like the Foundation, concerned with encouraging growth in literature, the location of its manifestations in these magazines suggests possibilities which might otherwise not exist. Almost by definition,
in this "theory," to encourage the work of writers and critics whose work is published in them, is to encourage whatever growth is in process. Acceptance for publication in them thus constitutes a kind of natural selection of the writers and critics on whom growth depends.\textsuperscript{133}

The notions that governed Blackmur's criticism were not opposed to activity "out in the world of action", but aimed to participate in the world of action, in almost their unaltered form—even the perennial "sensibility" is carried over into institutional \textit{modus operandi}.\textsuperscript{134} It is worth noting that Blackmur's essay "Towards a Modus Vivendi" began its life as a mimeographed memo, circulating among officers of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, before the essay was collected in \textit{The Lion and the Honeycomb} in 1954\textsuperscript{135}.

Out in the world of action, the context as well as the content of thought generates its utility, and it is worthwhile remembering that Blackmur's context in the 1950s included the activities of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Nelson Rockefeller had been involved with the formation of the first United States Information Service (USIS) libraries in the early 1940s, as Director of the Office of Internal Affairs. As more libraries opened throughout Europe and the Middle East during re-education efforts near the end of the Second World War, and, later, as these efforts were repurposed to combat Soviet propaganda, the libraries' administration shifted between the US Army, the State department, and back to the variously-titled USIS, while the service changed acronyms, funding sources, and placement in government
administration. It is possible, though not documented, that the Rockefeller Foundation took up some of the financial and administrative burden during the late 1940s and early 1950s, before the Smith-Mundt Act created a new purpose for the initiative. By 1953, the USIS was called the United States Information Agency (USIA), was cut off from the State Department at the insistence of John Foster Dulles, and was the beneficiary of close scrutiny by Senator McCarthy, who characteristically asserted that the libraries contained material written by communists and "subversives". This was likely true to a certain degree, as the libraries did contain second-hand books from Army surplus, shelved at the libraries when the Soviet Union was an ally. Nevertheless, the spectacle of disposing of the offending titles, some of which were burned, and Senator McCarthy’s exaggerated statement that 31,345 such books were circulating, created a drama around the overseas library system. This was not improved by the fact that many of the same titles had been destroyed by the Nazis the decade before.136

Added to this was a series of interviews, conducted by Roy Cohn and David Schine, assessing either the effectiveness or the loyalty of the USIA agents abroad. Richard H. Rovere, for The Reporter on July 21, 1953, gave the following account:

Cohn and Schine turned up in Paris on Saturday, April 4, and were off on their European tour. This expedition appears to have been set up only a few days in advance, and the purpose of it was so obscure that almost everywhere the travelers touched down they gave a different account of why
they were traveling. In Paris they said they were looking for inefficiency in
government offices overseas. In Bonn they said they were looking for
subversives. Asked in Munich which it was, Cohn explained that it was both.
"Efficiency," he said, "includes complete political reliability. If anyone is
interested in the Communists, then he cannot be efficient."137

In spring of 1953, the Rockefeller Foundation supplied a Grant in Aid of $6,100 " to
enable professor Richard P. Blackmur of Princeton University to establish contact
with writers and scholars in contemporary literature in Europe and the Near East".
His report on his year abroad includes four sections, including one entitled "United
States Information Service". Here is a sample from the report:

The USIS is concerned with the human mind, and it must be concerned
directly with the best minds in the area handled by each post, in order that
these minds may influence others. It must therefore select and send its
servants abroad equipped to understand the varied as well as the communal
character of the human mind. It is not so much concerned with selling one
issue, one version, of the mind as joining its issues. Loyalty is only a primary
matter in a foreign service officer, and should, once ascertained, be as much
taken for granted as, in a better world, it would have been in the first place.
There is a kind of treason to immediate objectives of policy in the conduct of
affairs of truth and its sister, Information: the treason known variously as
intelligence, good manners, elasticity, responsiveness, and competence in the field of action. There is no administrative machinery at Washington that can substitute for the relatively independent actions of these qualities in the field; nor is there any machinery anywhere (unless Providence stretches its obligations) which will not compel superfluous blunders when acting at a distance to replace judgment. Machinery is no good outside the field for which it was responsively designed; in small matters, as they are called, of culture and information, the only effective machines are the minds developed and trained on the spot, the terrain of operation.\textsuperscript{138}

The matter of loyalty, raised to enthusiasm by Senator McCarthy, shows R. P. Blackmur to his best advantage, as the voice of sense. Unlikely to be taken in by ideology of any kind, Blackmur knew intimately the "joining of issues" in the mind, while he noticed, for instance, that the libraries should supply translations of Tolstoi despite the rush of political turmoil that subjected them to various methods of disposal. Free distribution, not the politics of the authors distributed, was clear for Blackmur as the crowning objective. "The freely usable library is almost an American invention," he wrote, "and except in its American and sometimes its British forms does not exist in Europe and the Middle East." And continuing: "any existing directives requiring only American books ought to be withdrawn. American culture is not only American in its materials; neither is American Information, nor policy. There should be a King James Bible and a set of Shakespeare in every library."
Etc." The "Etc." is doing a lot of work here, but the point is unshakable. An R. P. Blackmur, faced with a Joseph McCarthy, appeals to reasonableness with the idea that thought and individuals cannot be assessed by a single dogmatic principle: too much is provisional, and the tides all change. In the mean time, and when principles became unrecognizable, it was best to trust one’s friends.

"To be a friend of yours," Delmore Schwartz wrote Blackmur, "is to deprive oneself the full benefits of your criticism." This was not strictly true, but something of it holds, and echoes in Blackmur’s elegy for his young friend John Walcott, a soldier and writer killed during the Second World War. "Three Poems from a Text: Isaiah LXI: 1-3" includes some of Blackmur’s best poetry: closest to experience, least preoccupied with its criticism in syntactical riddles. When the riddles arise, they have the awkward hush of thinking there is one last stair, and stepping onto nothing in the dark.

All day I trespassed on my friend’s new death,
and talked of it with strangers to give it handle,
the skill of a firm pressure in the handshake,
felt but not regarded. "My friend was killed!"
I had the voice but not the throat for gesture,
the seething in me was beneath control.
"Was killed in Italy on a high road."
I thought of dust, and rock, and hanging trees.
"Never was God revealed upon that road,
ever was man saved in that high place!"

James D. Bloom, in his book on Blackmur and John Berryman, *The Stock of Available Reality*, writes that this poem was in an accustomed mode for Blackmur, whom Bloom presents as a committed elegist.\(^1\) I think this is not quite right: the examples Bloom cites in *From Jordan's Delight*, "An Elegy for Five" and the sonnet sequence "For Horace Hall", do not read for me like true elegies, but games that play with the idea of adopting elegy as a formal principle, and occasionally crack jokes about the adoption. "An Elegy for Five" is clearly about the death of the speaker, possibly the philosopher's practice of death, and the inconvenience of dealing with the living. "For Horace Hall" seems clearly to joke about the pomp of funerary procedures: the first poem in the sequence mourns a figure who has lived past his wartime glory when the life since has been unfortunate: I find I cannot take the lines "At one side of his grave there stood his wife / and the three girls he spawned of dead man's stuff;" as the product of deeply felt grief. "For Horace Hall" is a sequence of poems about death, but they draw attention in a critical way, tongue part-way to the cheek, to persistent ceremonies that celebrate the human death-drive.

I can follow Bloom more readily when he asserts that there are echoes of Milton's "Lycidas" to be found in "Three Poems from a Text". I will not judge, with Bloom, whether "the diction and imagery are so patently Miltonic at points that the poem becomes an allusive homage," but Blackmur has "white anarchs shifting in the
moonlit room" where he might take the archaic word from *Paradise Lost*, and "swart unequal time" looks directly to "Lycidas"—valleys "on whose fresh lap the swart starre sparely looks." Much could turn on the use of a single word for Blackmur, and in this case the whole context of the poem, his mourning a young friend, a writer he had encouraged, killed before his time, hovers around the poem on these tiny gestures.""Laurel at table, ivy would spread," he said,"—another. But Blackmur is not, as Bloom would have him, an elegist: what is more, he surely remembered T. S. Eliot's caution that Milton was "a master we should avoid." Yet here Blackmur finds himself, shocked into mourning, simultaneously shocked with a situation that reminds him of the context of "Lycidas", Milton's mourning for his young friend, the poet Edward King, in a poem Blackmur surely knows he cannot hope to match or approach. But this enriches the sense of trespass, some awkward beauty of grief. Blackmur stands to give a funeral oration, and for once his mask falters.

Blackmur responded to John Crowe Ransom's essay on "Lycidas", "A Poem Nearly Anonymous". "Lycidas," Ransom said that the poem "is a literary exercise; and so is almost any other poem earlier than the eighteenth century; the craftsmanship, the formal quality which is written on it, is meant to have high visibility." He then lists all the memorial verse Milton had written at the time of composition, and concludes "There is no great raw grief apparent ever, and sometimes, very likely, no great grief. For Lycidas he mourns with a very technical piety." Blackmur responds:
You will observe that there are no statements of importance in it as to what "Lycidas" is about; only statements about formal aspects of structure and texture and formal names—such as "wit"—for the values to be found in the texture. There is no sense at all of that side of Milton which made the poet a builder of cities and maker of men or which made a good book the precious life blood of a master spirit. Nor is there any sense of the yoking together of violently contrasting themes. There is only a mention of The Waste Land as a poem comparable in our time to "Lycidas." This seems to be highly characteristic of the kind of criticism Ransom stands for and of the kind of philosophy—nineteenth- and twentieth-century—which bends its attention so almost exclusively to the problem of knowledge. Epistemology and ontology are the media through which Ransom experiences the problem of the relation between thought and feeling. Here once again is the solipsist trying to find out how he knows the only thing he can trust in the world he creates—the formal aspects in which it appears; but trying also to find some formal means, through the relation of texture to structure, of discussing the actual burden of knowledge as also a set of formal relations. Ontology is being: being, one supposes, is not a relation at all, nor a form; and what Ransom is really after is what inhabits form and what suffers relations.143

This would seem to re-hash Ransom’s critique of Blackmur, quoted at the beginning of this section. Yet there is something Blackmur believes that Ransom has missed: to
pretend that mimesis is a simple transmutation makes it a one-way street. If aesthetics must answer to "the world of action", only treating ideas as manipulable formal concerns will allow aesthetics to supply anything but material for propaganda: that is to say, only then will we have a poet’s criticism of life. To insist that close reading and technical discourse applies to textual matters, but not to the real-world ideas to which they refer, presupposes a single type of relation between the poem and the world—with reality remaining essentially impermeable. In certain moments, perhaps, this seems not to be the case. For Blackmur, to remove the ideas that get into poetry from the field of technical discourse was to impoverish close reading as a technique, and stabilize its terms to the point of irrelevance and collapse. "Being," as Blackmur says, "is not a relation at all, nor a form." This, after a fashion, is a technical criticism of Ransom’s chosen terms. But after another fashion, it is another sort of technical criticism, and sets Blackmur up in a new business entirely.

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Blackmur describes John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* as "rather a hundred-page essay, which is in itself too long", and by this point I risk worse censure. In any case, I have aimed to make irrelevant the question of whether or not R. P. Blackmur was a true poet-critic, on the assumption that there might be
more interesting things to say. But to end roundly, I will touch upon the matter, and conclude.

One of the observations made by Robert Boyers in *R. P. Blackmur: Poet-Critic* is useful, in this instance: he says (I paraphrase) that the poet-critic is not a unified genus in the animal kingdom of people of letters. There are poets who write some criticism in a mode of mind that is somehow separate-but-equal from their poetry, critics who occasionally dash off poems at the unpredictable stroke of the muse, and there is, perhaps, this designation of person of which R. P. Blackmur might be an exemplar, provided that T. S. Eliot falls in the first category and William Empson lands in the second.  

Yet if one follows Blackmur’s own lead, mapped by his method for discussing the perfect scholar-critic, he must find that Blackmur is not discussing a species of mind, but a set of complimentary hazards, assigning certain pitfalls to each mode of thinking (timidity for scholarship, arrogance for criticism), and noting that

Another way of expressing these characteristic defects of timidity and arrogance lies in remembering both St. Paul's words: The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life, and Eliot's paradoxical reversal of them: The spirit killeth, the letter giveth life; in which case Eliot was writing in the interests of criticism, St. Paul in those of scholarship.
What is described in "the perfect scholar-critic" is not really a person, but a mode of rational virtue in which the mind might move if it can orchestrate a happy unity of articulate imaginative richness, such as Blackmur finds among Plato's three modes of mind in St. Augustine and Dante:

to whom all the modes of the mind were equally parts and instruments of aesthetic experience, and each with a warrant to correct, modify, complete, and incarnate each of the other modes.

To make such an alliance seems to me a proper function of sacred books, the more especially as it might, in the sense that every marriage is a fight for life, restore to each its proper authority, that of the mind seen in direct action. There is an attractive force to mountain peaks; including the *apices mentis* which survive the floods by pure stature. The odd thing is that the force attracts even when we do not climb the peaks and our knowledge of them is something fusty and much garbled. The force is in the words that come into our mouths and in the daily actions of our minds.¹⁴⁷

To put it another way, all unhappy marriages are different, and failure is always the expense of greatness.

As such, a Blackmurian fascination would apply richly to instances of imperfect alliance, and a mind in the process of compassing the actual would have marital difficulties of the utmost interest. One could have tabloid spreads of poetic-
critical difficulties; scholarly-critical difficulties; dialectico-rhetorico-poetic difficulties, and so on. Complementary hazards might apply to each perspective, and the character of mind become as actual as the marriage of Emma Bovary, or the tip of her tongue in a cordial glass. So the analogy pops into imagery once again, and carries the tension of gossip back onto the field.

But a poem by R. P. Blackmur on the subject might resist the image a little longer, or extrapolate a further insight from the image according to a circular syntactical structure that obscures itself continually. Blackmur was fond of his friend Robert Fitzgerald's comment that Oedipus' answer to the Sphinx riddle was "a silly answer and that the Sphinx must have died by falling over backward from a kind of shame at his impertinence." What walks on four legs in the morning, then two, and finally three? "When Oedipus said Man", Blackmur writes, "he only proposed another riddle, as is clear if you read Sophocles' plays about him."148

Blackmur's poems are this type of puzzle, riddles for riddles, of the type that reward insight but will not necessarily invite you to share it: they are imaginative exercises in sign and countersign. Treating the marital issues of mind, in other words, we might find a poem that looks like this:

This marriage has insatiable, sad eyes
which looking once, enough, are yet unsatisfied,
needs must still peer until long peering prize
mere peering priceless—vainglorying pride.
What devil’s here? It is the marriage knot
our eyes, fast-craven, crave us to untie
then see what's tied, what's not.—Though gordian-cut,
still devil-tied, it snubs satiety.

Look further and there is no knot, because
there never was one till we said it so
reciting a daft dozen of old saws.
That devil’s absolute for action though:
I look again, immediate this, not far—
I am, she is, quick glance, caught breath: we are.

And indeed you will find it. It is on page 235, in the midst of Blackmur’s "Labyrinth of Being", and a key to the sense of "satiety" pops up in the untitled poem beginning "Fluttering feathers of air", which is printed in this edition for the first time, on page 342. Nevertheless, there is bound to be loss. The beauty of sad eyes has no key, except what is furnished by experience.

*This Edition and the Previous Edition*
This edition collects R. P. Blackmur's published poems, and provides a selection of his previously unpublished poetry. The decision to provide textually accurate versions of Blackmur's small body of published poems should require no defense, and responds to a series of prevalent omissions and erroneous transcriptions in the only previous edition, *Poems of R. P. Blackmur*, published by Princeton University Press in 1977. *Poems of R. P. Blackmur* was claimed by no editor. Denis Donoghue, who provided an introduction for that edition, has stated that the job of establishing the text may have fallen to one of the students of Joseph Frank, but Donoghue has also said that he is not certain to whom the work may be attributed: as the edition is now nearly thirty years old, it is perhaps best to let bygones be themselves. However, as the first editor to take responsibility for the transmission of R. P. Blackmur's poetry, I have considered textual accuracy my primary concern.

My first task in establishing the text was to locate all of Blackmur's published poems in their original book and periodical appearances. *Poems of R. P. Blackmur* notably excluded Blackmur's first published poem, "For Any Book", which appeared as a stand-alone pamphlet with a woodcut by Waldo Murray in 1924, preceding Blackmur's first periodical publication. While compiling lists of Blackmur's publications, and going through the files of magazines, I discovered that all of the available bibliographies of R. P. Blackmur's works were incomplete. I have therefore compiled a new bibliography, including all of Blackmur's publications (in verse and prose), and all published work about Blackmur in essays, books, poems, and
reviews. The bibliography is included in the present edition on p. 449, and is the most complete list of his publications to date, with 189 more entries than the fullest of the previous bibliographies (Carlos Baker's "R. P. Blackmur: A Checklist") supplies.

It is true that the anonymous Princeton edition does not make any claim to be complete. Even the book's title, *Poems of R. P. Blackmur*, suggests what has proven to be the case: the book does not include the poems of R. P. Blackmur, but only certain of his poems. R. P. Blackmur was celebrated, and sharpened his connections in the community of letters, as an editor of *Hound & Horn*, a little magazine of the 'twenties and 'thirties that grew beyond its initial status as "A Harvard Miscellany" due in part to Blackmur's nearly religious devotion to modern poetry and his extra-collegiate eye. Due to his involvement with *Hound & Horn*, Blackmur entered into correspondence with eminent figures of the modernist period, including Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and it was in this quarterly that many of his important critical essays first appeared to appreciative eyes. Given the status of this publication, not only for its own merits but for its place in Blackmur's career, it is remarkable that a poem first published in its pages ("A Monument Among the Winds" p. 307) was overlooked by some editor or editors aiming to compile R. P. Blackmur's poems. Also unrepresented and unmentioned is a distinct version of "A Funeral for a Few Sticks"—a poem that appeared in a much-shortened version in Blackmur's first collection of poems, *From Jordan's Delight*, in 1937—which Blackmur had submitted to T. S. Eliot for possible inclusion in *The Criterion* in 1925.
The submission generated the critical response from Eliot that is included in the commentary on page 43. "A Funeral for a Few Sticks" was published in larus: the Celestial Visitor in March, 1927, by Blackmur's friend Sherry Mangan. It appears in ten long sections, occupies nearly half of the magazine, and towers, on its final page, over Hart Crane's "March". In From Jordan's Delight, Blackmur has "A Funeral for a Few Sticks: Three Sections from an Early Poem" and these three of the ten sections are themselves reduced from the originals. The first published version of this poem is distinct from the version that appears in From Jordan's Delight, as confirmed by the added subtitle, and I have included the earlier version in the section of Uncollected Poems.

Publication dates are supplied for all previously published poems uncollected by Blackmur, along with detailed information on the sources of their texts. Poems of R. P. Blackmur gives a brief note with its section of Previously Uncollected Poems: the reader is told that "Dates of original publication, when known, have been added in brackets at the end of each poem." As I have located and examined all of the original periodicals, anthologies, and recordings in which Blackmur's poems appeared, I find that the publication date for every poem I have located and transcribed is known, and have been able to omit such a statement. Dates and publication information are recorded in the Apparatus Criticus that follows the texts.

Variant readings for all published versions of Blackmur's poems have been recorded in this edition for the first time. These include all variants in wording,
punctuation, capitalization, and ordering of sections. The latter is a frequent occurrence in Blackmur’s poetry, and the changes in order that he implements between publications are sometimes complex. I was obliged to devise a system for recording these changes, which is described in detail in the head-note of the *Apparatus Criticus*.

The delicacy of ordered sections in Blackmur’s poems, evinced by his frequent revisions of order, has encouraged me to preserve the arrangements of poems in his three collections of poetry—*From Jordan's Delight, The Second World*, and *The Good European*—as they appeared in the first editions. The appearance of various jotted-down lists of titles in different orders, which appear alongside drafts of certain poems, confirms that Blackmur’s ordering of these collections was quite deliberate. Coleridge advocated a chronological ordering, in order to best present the poet’s development or decay, but this choice would be particularly ill-suited to Blackmur’s careful arrangement of order in his poems, and his poor opinion of biographical justification generally. He was famously reticent with those who sought to pin him to his own life: his entry in *Twentieth Century Authors* reproaches him for his refusal to supply biographical information, and his biographical note in the 1940 Oscar Williams anthology reads, ”I have no biography.” Russell Fraser, in his biography of Blackmur *A Mingled Yarn*, reports that Blackmur ”regretted all objective reports of himself”, and laid out his plan for a book on Henry James with the belief that there ”was no biography, except what went into the books.” It is clear that Blackmur thought the preservation of the books more important than the
preservation of personal development. I have hoped to maintain that sense of his priority by the choice of ordering, and by giving focus to Blackmur’s published poems.

This edition does not include all of Blackmur’s unpublished poems, of which there are hundreds of samples to be found in the Blackmur Papers at the Firestone Library, Princeton University. Many of these appear to be fair copies. Yet Blackmur believed that even great poets look pale and tepid upon examination of their collected poems, and were better served by the pointed example.

Take the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, or any anthology of poems equally well known, and turn from the poems printed therein of such widely separated poets as Surrey, Crashaw, Marvell, Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Swinburne, to the collected works of these poets respectively [...] The anthology poems being well known are conceived to be understood, to be definitely intelligible, and to have, without inspection, a precise meaning. The descent upon the collected poems of all or any one of these authors is by and large a descent into tenuity.¹⁵⁴

R. P. Blackmur’s poetry would occasion a swift descent into tenuity were the entire collection of his extant poems to be included here. Many of the poems are early metrical experiments, and would be of interest to mainly to the initiated convert of the Blackmurian order. Such novices are scarce. Furthermore, Blackmur’s own
injunction, against "the sin of over-scrupulosity" pairs with his sense of the flatness created by exhaustively complete collections of any poet's poems. These twin conditions have led me to select characteristic samples from the body of his unpublished work. A future edition of R. P. Blackmur's poetry may take up the burden of presenting the complete unpublished poems: I have chosen to narrow my focus and, as Blackmur urged scholars to do, provide a sample that might shed light on what the work is about. For the purpose I have chosen to include a sheaf of early poems, and one late sample that straddles the divide between Blackmur's poetry and criticism.

George Anthony Palmer, Blackmur's cousin and closest friend, preserved a collection of Blackmur's poems in the order in which he received them in letters from 1921 through the mid-1930s. The poems are presumably the earliest ones that Blackmur considered finished, while awakening to poetry under the significant influence of Ezra Pound as modernism flourished in the early 1920s. The poems from Palmer's collection make up the section "From Letters to George". Though the typescripts and autograph manuscripts in this sheaf are not often dated, dates of composition are given in Blackmur's poetry notebooks, and comparison of the notebook poems with the Palmer sheaf has supplied dates of composition for many of the poems, which appear in the apparatus criticus along with notes, also supplied by the poetry notebooks, as to where the poems have been submitted and rejected. In addition to the poems sent to George Anthony Palmer, this edition includes another poem that took its final form in private communion with friends. "An Ad Lib
Version of La Mort des Artistes" is Blackmur’s take-off on the poem by Charles Baudelaire, and was his contribution to the first of the Christian Gauss Seminars in Criticism at Princeton University in October, 1949, an invitation-only event, organized by R. P. Blackmur, which focused on a series of talks on Baudelaire’s poetry by Erich Auerbach. The piece is half critical statement, half translation: if one considers Blackmur’s criticism poetic in nature, the ad lib is a kind of missing link, recalling Blackmur’s early opinion that the conclusion to Walter Pater’s Renaissance was a great prose poem.155

Poems of R. P. Blackmur includes two previously unpublished poems, but these are not noted as such, and are silently adopted in that edition’s section of Uncollected Poems. The unnamed editor made no attempt to account for Blackmur’s practice of typing out multiple copies of his poems to send to his friends, often with slight variations, and occasional errors, in each—this is a textual problem I have aimed to address by providing the texts exactly as they were sent to one known correspondent, and by comparing the typescripts to the fair copies in the poetry notebooks, held in the R. P. Blackmur collection at Princeton University. It is evident that no such comparison was made between versions of "A Testament on Faith" in establishing the poem's text for Poems of R. P. Blackmur, for a clear typographical error was carried over from one of the versions of the poem held with the Blackmur papers at Princeton: "pour out of my mouth perpetual vomit" is presented as "pour put of my mouth perpetual vomit". I have emended two such typographical errors: in "Moods and Recognitions" X, line 5,"play" replaces "paly"; and in "Moods and
Recognitions" XI, line 8, "down" replaces "doen". Unconventional spellings, such as "assymetric" and "baloon", have been preserved, as they do not obscure the sense of the lines in which they appear.

More striking errors, however, were carried forward by Poems of R. P. Blackmur, including a misplaced stanza from "All Sirens' Seine" which was printed as a second part of Blackmur's last extant poem, "Threnos", in the booklet that accompanied Blackmur's sound recording for the Yale Series of Recorded Poets in 1961. The repeated stanza was not noticed, or was treated as Blackmur's intention, though the mistake would have been very clear had the editor consulted the recording as well as the booklet—Blackmur reads the poem in its five-line version, as he wrote it, though it was printed incorrectly. The printing mistake also does not explain the Princeton edition's replacement of Blackmur's "threne" with the word "theme" in the same poem. Likewise, the strange appearance of unconsecutive section numbers in "From Jordan's Delight"—skipping abruptly from section VII to section X—was not challenged in the previous edition, resulting in the omission of two sections of the poem. I have noticed of my own copy of From Jordan's Delight that the two pages on which the missing sections appear have a tendency to stick together and obscure themselves. Apart from these mistakes, Poems of R. P. Blackmur includes four errors in wording, and two errors of formatting. This edition corrects these errors, but records their passage in the apparatus criticus as a chapter in the textual history of the poems.
Notes

2 "The Lion and the Honeycomb". LH 180.
3 Ibid. 189.
4 The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Table Talk, ed. Carl Woodring (1990), I. 353 (21 April 1832).
6 "The Experience of Ideas". LG 342.
10 "The Expense of Greatness: Three Emphases on Henry Adams". EG 274.
11 Palmer letters. Folder 8, item 2. 15 September 1939.
12 "Between the Numen and the Moha". LH 290.
13 RPB on Ernest Hemingway: "he writes to get rid of the weight of experience by recording it, by expressing it like a juice; and he is read largely for similar purposes." "The Experience of Ideas", LG 341.
15 Ibid. 25.
16 Ibid. 9.
17 Ibid. 8.
18 "The Experience of Ideas". LG 342.
19 "The Great Grasp of Unreason". AM 5.
20 Ibid.
21 "From Jordan's Delight" XI, "The Journeyman Rejoices". 12.

RPB uses the term "black puritan" to describe Thomas Mann, while discussing novel Felix Krull, which he states "is in effect a marvelous and heightened version of my own autobiography, and it is with great personal regret that I remember that he died before he could carry the story beyond the hero's twentieth year. I regret that I shall never know what was in store for me in the unwritten years of my life." "The Techniques of Trouble". AM 19.


"W. B. Yeats: Between Myth and Philosophy". LG 111.

Davie, op. cit. 29.

"W. B. Yeats: Between Myth and Philosophy". LG 111.

Davie, op. cit. 29.

"Lord Tennyson's Scissors". LG 431.

"Between the Numen and the Moha". LH 302.

"T. S. Eliot: From Ash Wednesday to Murder in the Cathedral". DA 180.

"In the Hope of Straightening Things Out". LH 162.

"The Lion and the Honeycomb." LH 182.

"John Wheelwright and Dr. Williams". LG 351.


"Humanism and Symbolic Imagination: Notes on Re-Reading Irving Babbitt". LH 149.

"John Wheelwright and Dr. Williams" LH 348.

Ibid. 349-350.

Ibid. 350.


"Humanism and Symbolic Imagination: Notes on Re-Reading Irving Babbitt". LH 152.

Palmer letters. 6 May, 1921.


See p. 129.

"Unappeasable and Peregrine: Behavior and the 'Four Quartets'". LG 199.


"An Adjunct to the Muses' Diadem". LG 161.

"Masks of Ezra Pound". *Hound & Horn. 7:2* (Jan.-March 1934) 177-212.


Palmer letters. "Eighth of October. Anno odi nineteen hundred and twenty two".

"Eighth of October Anno odi nineteen hundred and twenty two."


Ibid. ix.

"The Great Grasp of Unreason". AM 5.

"The Lion and the Honeycomb". LH 186.


See p. 337.


"T. S. Eliot from Ash Wednesday to Murder in the Cathedral". DA 189-190.


*Book of Common Prayer*.


See p. 263.

"Toward a Modus Vivendi". LH 8.

"The Great Grasp of Unreason". AM 11

"Poetry is by no means to be understood as anything buy an inadequate substitute for religion; and it is because we can take Greek mythology—or Buddhist, or Egyptian-only as poetry that we cannot take it as religion." ("Humanism and Symbolic Imagination: Notes on Re-Reading Irving Babbitt". LH 152.)


In 1936: "Mr. Leo Stein makes somewhere an analogous distinction that if you look at the sea and are sentimental you will feel yourself infinite, but that if you are concerned with the object experienced you may or may not feel that
the sea is infinite, a much harder thing to feel, and, incidentally, a much more difficult exercise in mystical intuition." ("The Experience of Ideas". LG 342.)


83 Palmer letters. 12 April 1923.

84 "Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language". DA 7.


86 "Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language". DA 8.

87 "Language as Gesture". LG 5.


89 Ibid. 12.

90 "Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language". DA 9. RPB later owned up to the provenance of this maxim, and supposed it had meaning for T. S. Eliot: "It has always seemed to me that Eliot must have heard read the same words I heard in Professor Wood's course in Indian Philosophy, for the notes were very old when I heard them used: "The reality in words, gentlemen, is both superior to and anterior to any use to which you can put them."" ("In the Hope of Straightening Things Out". LH 170-171.)


92 There is an analogue in Blackmur's early review of Ezra Pound, "Amazing Poetry", discussed p. 44.

93 Tate to RPB, 23 Feb. 1931. Princeton Papers.

94 "The Lion and the Honeycomb", LH 194.

95 Palmer letters. July 17, 1922.


97 "Between the Numen and the Moha". LH 291.


100 Smith, Janet Adam. Review of Time in the Rock: Preludes to Definition, Conrad Aiken; From Jordan's Delight, RPB; The Mediterranean, and other poems, Allen Tate; Calamiterror, George Barker; Sebastian, Rayner Heppenstall; The Disappearing Castle, Charles Madge. The Criterion. 16:65 (July 1937) 701 ff.


102 "Language as Gesture". LG 15-16.

103 T. S. Eliot: "How astonishing it would be, if a man like Arnold had concerned himself with the art of the novel" ("Introduction". The Sacred Wood. Methuen, 1920. xi.)
In the Gymnopédies and in the Socrate there is the shyness and sweetness of genuine competence, and there is the modest simplicity of mastery—very different, by the way, from the bravura of the tyro or the teacher. The form of these pieces, and the content, is like the wind. There is the bulk and firmness and at the same time the continuity in evanescence, the frailty of a created thing. And this is right; for it is music dealing with the wisdom of human flesh, and flesh approximating nature. Inspiration is in the breath, we should remember, and spirit in the wind; wisdom and spirit are no parts of things: they are the air of things, the music of things." (RBP. "Erik Satie—Three Men in a Tub". Review of Gymnopédie No. 1. Music Lovers' Phonograph Monthly Review. 4:10 (July 1930) 351.)

On Herbert Read and Wallace Stevens”. LG 258.

"Between the Numen and the Moha". LH 300.

"Notes on Four Categories of Criticism". LH 222.


"Before Sentence is Passed”. p. 253.


"Effigy". p. 302.

RBP was inconsistent in his ideas about "shaping" in relation to literature. In a 1935 essay on Hart Crane, "New Thresholds, New Anatomies", RPB responds to Crane's short essay "Modern Poetry": "Poetry is not, as Crane says it is, an architectural art—or not without a good deal of qualification; it is a linear art, an art of succession, and the only art it resembles formally is plain song." Blackmur later revised this statement in "Language as Gesture", which first appeared in the volume of the same name in 1952, and compared poetry to each of the arts—beginning with architecture: "The clearest and most familiar example of gesture in architecture is the spire on a church, for we have all seen church spires whether we go to church or not. Bad spires weigh a church down and are an affair of carpentry rather than architecture, an example of formula stifling form. A good spire is weightless, springing, an arrow aimed at the Almighty, carrying, in its gesture, the whole church with it. Though it may have been as much made out of formula as the bad spire, it differs in that the formula has some how seized enough life to become form again; which is one way of saying what gesture does in art—it is what happens to a form when it becomes identical with its subject. It does this, in the case of a spire, by giving the sense of movement, of aspiration, as a tree or a shrub gives the sense of process of growth, or as a beautiful room gives the effect of extending space rather than enclosing it. This sense of movement in "actually" inert mass and empty space
is what we call gesture in architecture. So, too, we feel that pillars are mighty, that a bridge spans or leaps, that a dome covers us, or a crypt appalls us."


117 "Venus as Evening Star", section IX of "From Jordan's Delight". p. 171.

118 "New Thresholds, New Anatomies". DA 130.


121 Quotation from RPB’s contributor’s note to *Perspectives USA*: "R. P. Blackmur, the editor of this issue, is completing a study of Dostoevski which will be published this year. Blackmur’s previously published works include a collection of his critical essays, *Language as Gesture* (1952), and three volumes of poetry: *From Jordan's Delight* (1937), *The Second World* (1942), and *The Good European* (1947). Both his poetry and his criticism evince the toughness of an essentially metaphysical outlook"


123 Eg. "The thematic emphasis of the poetry tends to go in the same direction as does the critical emphasis; that is, the poetry, like the criticism, becomes progressively more preoccupied with social themes." (Pannick, Gerald J. *Richard Palmer Blackmur*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.)


127 RF papers. RPB to John Marshall, 22 Jan. 1941.


129 RF papers. Box 243, folder 2906: Literary magazines study. Memo stamped March 14, 1944.


132 The popular article that went viral on social media websites in 2013 can be found online at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/modern-art-was-cia-weapon-1578808.html.


134 John Crowe Ransom, due to his involvement with the KR, might have been aware of RPB’s involvement with the RF. His view of RPB’s activities is not known. 31 Dec. 1951, John Marshall expressed disappointment with JCR’s report to the RF: "I find
Ransom’s report on the RF grant to the Kenyon Review rather disappointing. The writers he lists are undoubtedly a worthy group. But their benefit, monetarily, seems to have been 'to them that hath.' Of the highest payments for prose, those to Isaac Rosenfield and Leslie Fiedler are gratifying in the sense of their need, and possibly also in the case of Eleanor Clark. But Bentley, Blackmur, Empson, Levin and Stanley Hyman seem definitely among the 'haths.' And the same would seem true of Robert Lowell among the poets."


140 Tessa Horton, in an interview with Russell Fraser Sept. 1976, says that Walcott may have been assassinated. Robert Darrell’s papers (in private hands, examined by Fraser) describe Walcott’s work in military intelligence. MY 306.


144 Ibid. 622.


146 "The Lion and the Honeycomb". LH 182.

147 Ibid. 185.

148 "The Artist as Hero". LH 46.


150 Example may be found in Princeton University’s collection of R. P. Blackmur papers, ex. Blackmur Papers C0227 Bx10 F12 (1).


"Notes on E. E. Cummings' Language." DA 12.

Palmer letters. Folder 1, item 4. July 13, 1921: "You ask as to whether there should be any definite, systematic rhythm in the content of that hybrid thing, 'Prose Poetry.' The thought that at once formed itself in my mind upon reading your question, was decidedly negative. In fact, I believe that a Prose Poem is differentiated from other prose (when it is written as it should be written—as I sometimes try to write it) only in subject matter; the only difference in form being a greater concision. On the other hand there should be rhythm; rhythm that varies with the thought it makes more clear, that is slow moving, sinuous, staccati, light, cynically bitter, or what not, as occasion demands. An example of what might be called a Prose Poem, even Poetry, is the four pages forming the conclusion to Pater's Renaissance: could the meaning be rendered in a single phrase it would still be poetry."

"From Jordan's Delight" III, 25-26 omits a stanza break; "Of Lucifer" III, 14 has "vain hopes" instead of "vainhopes"; "Before Sentence is Passed" 34-35 omits a stanza break; "Thirteen Scarabs for the Living" XII, 4 gives "dead most dead" for "deadmost dead"; scarab XIII gives "faithful fellow" for "faith full fellow"; "The Good European: 1945" III gives "new begin" for "newbegin".
Chronology


1905  The Blackmurs relocate to New York City. His father, George Edward, is a stock broker there.

1910  Move to Cambridge, Mass., settling at 52 Irving Street, down the block from the Cummings and Babbitt households.

1913-16  Attends Peabody Grammar School on Linnaean Street in Cambridge.

1916  Enters Cambridge High and Latin School.

1918  Expelled from Cambridge High and Latin School. Takes various jobs: simultaneous soda jerk, clerk at Widener Library. Defecates on the front steps of his one-time headmaster.

1921~  Meets the Harvard poets of his generation, and life-long friend John Marshall: "I have known Blackmur since we were boys of eighteen. As you may or may not know, he deliberately chose not to go to Harvard, but in a sense he went through Harvard with my class." (Rockefeller papers. 200s Box 34, f 214.)


1925  April: first publication of unsigned review in The Dial. October: Proposes to Tessa. Two weeks later, her refusal. Halloween: meets Helen Dickson.
1926 Dickson & Blackmur Used Books, a venture with Wallace Dickson on borrowed capital from Maurice Firuski. Blackmur receives a letter from T. S. Eliot in response to his poem "A Funeral for a Few Sticks", praising it, but declining publication. "Alma Venus", his first published poem, appears in Poetry, in the same issue as Hart Crane’s "At Melville’s Tomb".

1927 Bankruptcy of Dickson & Blackmur. Becomes Firuski’s secretary, and a bookseller at his Dunster House Bookshop. "A Funeral for a Few Sticks" appears over Hart Crane’s "March" in larus: The Celestial Visitor in March. Begins editorial work for Hound & Horn, which is launched in September.

1928 Editing Manager of The Hound & Horn, paid a small salary by Lincoln Kirstein and Bernard Bandler. Correspondence with Ezra Pound. Publishes first major essay, on T.S. Eliot, which is brought out as a book this year by The Hound & Horn after first being serialized in the magazine.

1929 Last issue of The Dial. Blackmur listed as "Editor" on the masthead of The Hound & Horn.

1930 Spring: fired from his position at Hound & Horn. Marries Helen Dickson, June 14. Summers at Harrington, Maine begin.

1931-5 Publishes seminal essays on E. E. Cummings, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, Henry James, and Hart Crane, four of these in the Hound & Horn.

1933 Move to Chambers Street, Boston.


1935 Publishes The Double Agent, the first book of what will come to be known as "the new criticism" to be published in the United States.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>First correspondence with John Berryman, who commissions an essay by RPB on Allen Tate’s criticism for the <em>Columbia Review</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Guggenheim Grant for a book on Henry Adams. <em>From Jordan’s Delight</em> is published.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Guggenheim Grant extended for a second year, for a book on Henry Adams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Death of John Wheelwright in Boston. RPB accepted as Allen Tate’s &quot;associate&quot; at Princeton University. Lives at 43 Linden Lane. <em>The Expense of Greatness</em> is published. Contract to <em>New Directions</em> for a book on Henry James.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Letter to John Marshall, now working for the Rockefeller Foundation, regarding funding for the <em>Kenyon Review</em>. Writes prefatory Note for John Wheelwright’s <em>Selected Poems</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Death of John Walcott under unknown circumstances in Italy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>First Grant in Aid to the Kenyon Review. Little magazine study begins.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>John Berryman becomes Associate in Creative Writing at Princeton, develops close association with RPB. Volley of letters on promising literary magazines from Blackmur, Trilling, Cowley, on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Rockefeller Fellowship in the Humanities, to &quot;continue his work of literary criticism&quot;. <em>The Good European</em> is published. Formation of the Central Intelligence Agency. Blackmur’s friend Philip Horton, the husband of Tessa Gilbert, becomes the CIA’s first Station Chief in Paris.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>First Princeton Seminars in Literary Criticism, later renamed the Christian Gauss Seminars. Weekly lunch</td>
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</table>
meetings with J. Robert Oppenheimer at Lahière's on Witherspoon Street.

1951  
Full professorship with tenure. Divorced from Helen Dickson.

1952  
*Language as Gesture* published.

1953  
Scandal with USIA libraries abroad. Blackmur travels to Europe to "establish contact with writers and scholars in contemporary literature in Europe and the Near East": Italy, England, Germany, Egypt, the Middle East. Produces lengthy four-part report, including much on the USIA, for the Rockefeller Foundation, referred to in-house as "Another Blackmur Opus".

1955  
*The Lion and the Honeycomb* published.

1956  

1957  
Eight months' leave from Princeton; travel to Asia. "New Criticism in the United States" lectures at Nagano, Japan. *Form and Value in Modern Poetry* is published.

1961  
Pitt Professor of American History and Institutions. Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, where he is mostly disliked. Awarded Cambridge M. A.

1962  
Stay at the Villa Serbellone, Bellagio, Italy.

1964  
*Eleven Essays in the European Novel* published.

1965  
Dies February 2.

1967  
Posthumous publication of *A Primer of Ignorance*, edited by Joseph Frank.

1977  
The Poems
For Any Book

Take it up then — this book or that; another husk or ghost, some other’s passion squeaks among your bones.

This rite is old, a monument of voices. It is this page, this film of printed matter, the skin of a slain god hung up on a cross, hung up to dry, to wither and shrink — for the sun’s years to parch. This rite is old. It is eternal lamentation and warning of the voice of a heart’s night foreign, foreign and terrible to our ears. A host of names, and the things under names.

Yet call them back, the old, thrusting winds and murderous, gaping seas. Call the old names— of the pitiless and drifting horde of the cities and temples of the dreamed dead.

(In any book the bodies under the page. Ah see in the half-light, the corpses floating inattentive and straight.)

A girl ran wild out of lust, a man dreamed of cobalt shores and flowing gold. Bright gods and dark ghosts driven to all ends of the earth; there they rest, their history, fictive and insolent.

Yet call them back.
From Jordan's Delight
1937
FROM JORDAN'S DELIGHT

I

Redwing
What is that island, say you, stark and black—
A Cythera in northern exile? sung
Only by sailors on the darkward tack
Or till the channel buoy give safety tongue?
   Here is no Eldorado on the wane:
   New Sirens draw us in, in silent seine.

Men do not come to live here, but to spend
Memory, time, and the long sense of flight,
And find by spendthrift each one image friend
That might outlast him and himself benight:
   In spending tides, spent winds, and unspent seas
   Find out the flowering desert dark, soul's ease.

Redwing was driven so and so drawn in,
A bearded fisher in his own annoy
Hearing without all hallowèd within,
The hermit prison-crying in the boy,
   The broken promise cutting the inward grain,
   The heart throstling the sweet-tormented brain.

Redwing was jilted forty years ago;
What wilted waits for water still, what winced
Still tenders when his fingers free and fro
The mooring-buoy, and he, each fair tide since,
   Full-bearded, full awry, takes second sight
   Of exile in the black isle, Jordan's Delight.

(Once I was with him, he within me yet,
When while the ash of dawn was colding through
And the ashen tiller stick was creaking wet
He sang of Oh, the foggy, foggy dew!—
   Then felt, and lost, the long, low-running swell
   That buoyed his words up, voice that made them spell.)

All broken ground and ledges to the east
Awash and breaking, this island has a loom
Never to be forgotten from the west
And never to be left without sea-room.
O Redwing, by your ruddled beard I swear
Jordan shall wreck you yet, and wrecking spare.

This stony garden crossed by souring cries—
Gull bleat, hawk shriek, mouse and eagle screams—
Retrieves, O Redwing, silence in your eyes:
It is excruciation that redeems;
    Redeems, O Redwing, by your blood I swear,
    The still brain from anhungered sirens there.
II

_The Foggy Foggy Dew_

O Jordan young Jordan O sailoring friend,
I’m sailing for ye that sailor no more;
Though the moon’s shut in and sun shut out
And all the sea’s a drifting shore,
Though tide-rips clout and put me about
And the lather of cross-slops crab my oar,
I’ll sail her true and ’cordin’ to;
—And oh, the foggy foggy dew!

Where were your eyes that day, young Jordan,
For the rocking rise, the glimmering land-loom?
Where your ears, my gooding boy,
For the smalling seas that shift the shingle?
Where was your feel for a shoaling keel,
The shiver and shawling, yawning of doom?
Your grandfather knew, and so now you;
—And oh, the foggy foggy dew!

Your first grandfather first, young Jordan,
Old he that in his shipwrecked thirst
Sucked sea-fog off his aching lips
And sucked but caking salt—and slaking
Followed voices on the sea.
As then came you, now I askew;
—And oh, the foggy foggy dew!

Hear now, young Jordan, salt that you are,
Where was your dread and where now mine?
The trough and the surge, the urge of the dead,
These are our manna, salt for wine.
O heaven-swell, O passing-bell,
Hearing I know ye, all ye spell;
Hold me true in long haloo:
—And oh, the foggy foggy dew!
III

All Things are a Flowing
Flowers do better here than peas and beans,
Here nothing men may save can save its mark;
Reason a glitter flowing blues to greens
Beyond the offshore shoals gains ocean dark.
   The poor within us climb the cliff and stare
   Through second eyes and are sea-beggared there.

Sun warms the flesh, but in the marrow, wind;
The seagulls over head and neater tern
Scream woodthrush in the birches out of mind.
How warm a marrow cold enough to burn!
   There is no shelter here, no self-warm lair,
   When every lung eddies the ocean air.

All’s weather here and sure, visible change;
It is the permutation of the stone,
The inner crumbling of the mountain range,
Breathes in our ears sea râle and moan.
   And this the steadied heart, our own, must bear:
   Suncalm and stormcalm, both in breathless air.

Here men wear natural colours, mostly blue,
Colour of fusion, shade of unison,
Colour of nothingness seen twice, come true,
Colour the gods must be that come undone:
   Colour of succour and mirage, O snare
   And reservoir, death ravens in arrear.
IV

*Con coloriti Flori et Herba*

O flowering mosses
Flowering stone
Above the barnacles and sea urchins
Above the lichen and washing weed
The slow heave the pull the give and lift
O fugitive
Quiet almost it is so far and freed
Translucent waters are
When the wave crosses

Above them all on the vain edge
Crawl, crawl out O flowering cliff
And look you down
Heave and give to the easy all uneasing swells
Look where if you fall
To the washing ledge
O blessed Francis

Such is the red stonecrop
The purpling pink sea-pea
The blue legume with bluest bloom
And blue harebell
Laced in the fissured dripping rock
Where if you fall
Falling and calling

Tenacity of fingers
Of suddenly resourceless eyes

So frail so far O Francis
This and the flowers are
So long it lingers
This good and evil chance is
You batter and you blessed drown
V

*Midnight the Stable Place*

Below the southern, seaward ledges, where,
Such is the heavy weathering away,
No flower grows, no silence hearts the air,
Each rock gives slowly from its utmost bay,
    There comes the day's calthumpian, all afleer,
    In his midwaste quotidian King Lear.

His great moonface rumridden and windshot,
His voice the cleaving of the wind to sea,
He drives full speed head on and sets his pots
In his own image and without a lee,
    Safe in the backwash of the ledge at bay,
    An act of God who does not die this day.

It is midwaste of breaking and the foam,
Midblack the upward curve, the flecking lace,
There always order gives disorder room,
There always midnight is the stable place.
    There in the blossoming of waywardness,
    O stalwart Lear, you eddy and confess.
VI

*O Sleeping Lear*

Wayward the wind weighs
For us who merely be
Westly on warm days
Eastly to rough the sea

Here wayward fishers come
Full twelve on the rock beach
To split a salvaged drum
Red rum and ruddy speech

Here one came all undone
Shirt out and jaw askew
Slipping jarred his gun
And blood ran ruddy too

What blood was that what gale
What yelling, belling cry
What signal in wind’s wail
What fading frosting eye

Wayward the wind weighs
For us who merely be
All steady north these days
And no mirage asea

The blessed man got up
From rum and lobster ran
Huge to the north cliff top
And giant there began

Heaving the island down
And heaving the boulder word
Earth clods wood red, root brown
Until he fell and snored

Who shall the sleeper mock
Who smoothe his thinning hair
O eddy of whorled rock
O eddying headlost air
VII

_Cythera without Disguise_

It is the place of exile we divine
Will be uncovered in this ocean dark,
The place in all ill falling that we mark
Bottom: the drifting place in rock and wine.
   Look there, the closing of the sea in night,
   The falling of all human dark, eye-bright.

Ah, Dorothy, deny me if you can;
Here on this isle, exile and ever home,
This Jordan spating the full sea to foam,
Deny all that is inmost and no man.
   There's no revulsion, but certain undisguise:
   The fear, the Siren, birth in extinguished eyes.

"Ah, Dorothy, on your isle I find upright and just
Only the gibbet where there hangs our double image.
Ah, Lord our common God, give me the strength and courage
To contemplate this heart this flesh without disgust."
   Here to my ghost of need provide expense,
   All ravening seed, all summoning violence.
VIII

The Song for Dorothy

Climb from the sea within
That buoyant swallows up
—O hope and tempest cup—
Each altar of our gain;

Climb upwards like a cry,
Climb like eyesight harking,
Dorothy, till eyes darken
And all but the light die;

Climb till the flowering cliff
Seeds in precipice
The swallowing sea’s abyss.
Climb to the perfect gift.

Comes out of manners, man:
Sure in despair, rejoice!
All exile mirrors choice
Beneath stilled seas’ élan.

Here most by twilight see
For all our climbing, how
The sea is rising, now
Is tiding, high as we.

Look out, how high, how far,
Dorothy, through nearing eyes:
Radiance, the terror, plies
From sea to shoring star.
IX

Venus as Evening Star

Ah, Sedley, you were something sweet: "Love still
Has something of the sea;" and life, perhaps,
Has something silent in it, growing ill,
The frail and aching place of the great gaps.
First love was one, my first friend lost another
(By jealous trust), and then the canyon cut
Between one moment and its nearest brother
Cut so to death's gulf yawning in the gut.

Oh, something sweet: "From whence his mother rose."
In silence as the after seas die-down
Love falls away, and death, and my own pose,
And no gaps showing where I saw them drown.
   Now wind's asea, the first sea-star is bright,
   Look there for Venus, far in years of light.
X

All Sirens’ Seine

Here under Jordan’s seamost ledge
On splintered shale and chowdered sand
Always it is gulf’s dragging edge
Where we await highwater stand.

Here all the tides of Sirens climb,
Borne upwards from the settling waves,
Borne upwards and over and back,
From spring to neap, and each its slack.

How sing they of our washing graves,
How lift and draw us in, how heave
And buoying snare us in heaven’s seine,
Who in our dying parts still climb,
And falling strand our living gain.

The rising and falling, lag and retrieve,
Sun heave and withdrawing,
Moon lift and imploring,
The spring of hours and neap of time,
The drift, the range, spindrift, the soaring:
What bench-mark harks the ever change?

All waves are angel messengers
Horizon outwards and away,
All steady swells the summoners:
The voices in us where we sway.

They are the crying spites the ear,
The silence in us, all the fear,
Ringing where we cannot reach:
The nothing-hope that cravens speech.

Savour of first tear
Clamour of last denial
Wolf-need and hunger of trust
The aching all-folly of trial
Judgment of foam prison of dust

Cover the hush; all we have lost
And have believed, annihilate;
Cover the nothing that is there.
Here on this rock and rocking beach,
Uncover us, we are the cost,
All that is washed inviolate
When our full tidings seaward reach.
A new nothingness is left bare.

See there upon full sea the still
Blossoming of Jordan's heath,
And on the change, all living ill:
O eddying, bodiless faith.
XI

_The Journeyman Rejoices_

Some irony out of the common mind,
Some wisdom gathered, and returned, like night,
Saw half-united, half at odds, the blind
Conjunction in the name, Jordan’s Delight.

What Jordan’s that?—Some journeyman of despair
Lived here and died fishing foul weather fair.

And what delight?—Some bleak and gallant face,
Lonely in words, but under words at home,
Might look, might almost see, a first wind-trace,
What hardness rock and flower overcome.

It is the sea face that we hidden wear
So still, rises, rejoices, and is bare.
O F L U C I F E R

I

*The Seed*

Renounce, O Lord my God, renounce for me,
O giver-up of life and love and ghost,
not pride nor contumely—renounce most
the bitter-sweet sin of gross humility;
that taken, and annulled, from memory,
I might, reprieved from wanhope's whipping post
and half-consuming fires, once more be lost
in imperfection and necessity.

I need no Lucifer, O Crucified!
to bush the light that blossoms in my eyes,
no Adversary to out-pride my pride;
there is the animal welling in my thighs
that, over-weened, out-towered by his own need,
spends his intolerable, unappeasable seed.
II

_The Trope_

The weather, and the earth that suffers it, the water, and what the waters bear and hide, these, and the burning stars, together lit, O Lucifer, the meteor of my pride in my own sight; that is, the soughing trees, the rise of a calm tide, the covered ledge, the star-height thought in minutes and degrees made me Apollo new to the light’s edge.

My island knowledge mounts—such is my fright—a continent, and mounting raises me upon a windless, sealess, starless night apart. Grant, Lucifer, my fall may be like thine a meteor burnt in its own light; —and all take cover in a fallen sea.
III

*The Fruit*

Ah, Lucifer, the mind is lonely, love
still lonelier, that knows the soul is thine;
all given things must be as treasure trove
received; all taken, dug from the soul’s mine.
It is the looking-glass makes evil-browed
and cold the isolated self reviewed;
it is discovery that makes pride proud,
the crying out that echoes solitude.

Therefore we turn to thee to feature forth
for us, as in an actor’s strut and voice,
the needs that all unadded add our worth,
that, bottoming despair, let us rejoice.

Thine, arch rebel, these words, thine all we lose:
the sum of vainhopes that we cannot use.
IV

The Entropy

I have lain down, enacting emptiness
within a sleep: heaven is empty so,
a sleep without the body's sloth for dress,
without the wakened loss the mind must know;
have risen up, resuming the bright blood,
the pumping heart, still brain, and feasting eye
and am thus sheathed and trapped in solitude:
a separated life that still can die.

How shall I ponder these in the cold stream,
the wordless and unsummoned sense that springs
indifferent beneath all words? Which dream,
humble or proud, shall smoothe these sufferings?

Ah, Lucifer, this is the truest hell,
where death alone shall be impossible.
When I lay sick and like to die
five chosen friends came out to call;
for each I put my bottles by
and arched my back against the wall.
The live man visiting the sick
within him finds his own death quick.

Each was embarrassed, and the first,
who could not give his hand the most;
he kept ten fingers tightly pursed
to clasp his own half-given ghost.
His whitened knuckles more than mine
showed how death climbs live veins, a vine.

My friend believe me, even you
for whom all friendship is caress,
no hand can ever touch the blue
background of others’ nothingness.
As night horizons close the sea
in you death closes death in me.

The second brought a singing voice
as if, such was her rising fear,
she might by heaping noise on noise
delude a little her inward ear.
Hot with the longing in her brain
her pink shells reddened in refrain.

And now my friend believe me, death
that ends voice, has none of its own;
no slightest sibilance of breath
can ever give to silence tone,—
nor friendship ever in a word
escape separate silence heard.

The third kept taking from the air
half-savourèd morsels of disease,
the hope that garnishes despair;
and tasting swallowed all his ease.
Upon his purpling lips I saw
death rise ruminant from his maw.
Believe now, friend, this is the gist of old friendship and all its savour: the unpredictable last tryst when neither feeds on other's favour, but each can in his salt blood taste the sea that rising lays us waste.

The fourth put lilies in a vase to mix the scent of their distress with mine, and prayed the two bouquets might fuse themselves, and coalesce. Immovable, her nostrils meant she smelt herself, intent.

Believe, now more than ever, friend, odours are omens on the air, signals that interchange and blend solitudes they cannot impair. Death, as it signals us, perfumes the ecstasy the flesh resumes.

The fifth, by grace, came late at night when I was thoughtful, and his eyes absorbing mine absorbed their light and the dark image that in them lies. Across his naked face he wore the long shudder of one death more.

Wherefore, my bitter friend, believe friendship that wears to nakedness, like life, like hope, leaves least to grieve and most, O sweet unknown, to bless: the sight that proves each man alone—unknowable death, as such, made known.
This man was yours, O Death, these fifteen years: he who had been best dead when gassed, in battle, was mortgaged out a kind of living chattel, for a late funeral and rehearsed tears. At one side of his grave there stood his wife and the three girls he spawned of dead man's stuff; three Legion buglers blew, for his cast slough, a mid-day taps. There was no drum or fife.

Now, Sire, you have him, may your majesty lecher again beneath his striped shroud; let us who must remember him, now see upon whose service we stand here, bowed.

That much we earned when his expiring breath removed from us a fifteen-year-big death.

FOR HORACE HALL

I
II

Wilson, the man was yours that April noon
you saw your people’s clutching hand as mailed
and, to the bluster of a British tune,
the passionate peace of Jefferson was staled.
If Page and Colonel House were gulled by Grey,
you, poor Messiah, were worse gulled by them:
content you on this loud inglorious day,
this dust the soil you spilt on Clio’s hem.

The man was yours, is dead as you are dead;
like you, who in the textbooks of the schools
gain glory daily, of him it shall be said,
likewise: Always, in death, the hero rules.
God grant we know, and never know again,
your lives found ignominy sovereign.
III
The sword comes first to mind but not to hand;
the argument was bloodier and the game
much slower than the sword can understand
unless the blade be twisted out of name.
And so it is the man is yours, O Lord,
twisted by rule until his blood-drenched lung
made mustard gas seem more the threatened sword
than Saladin’s when the true Church was young.

But yours as well, O Lord, another way;
this scapegoat of a scapegoat might heap up
his after-knowledge on a pyre and pray:
his the last blood in the armed idol’s cup;
    the last, in nineteen hundred years’ increase,
    Prodigal of that Lord who brought, not peace.
IV
Let public feeling go, there Horace Hall
lies in his fortune and his country’s flag,
Lift him, it is the weight of death will fall
and in the bottom of your belly sag.
Touch him and in your bowels the new cold
is not imagined but a manifest—
that you, oblivious, already fold
and nurture a cold passion for cold rest.

What hope is that you swallow, seeing death
put under earth and firmed with prim, saved sod?
What hope that saps you like a fear? What breath
is that which leaves you, leaving a full fraud?

I think that each man dying sows the wind
and we the dry seed pods he leaves behind.
SEA ISLAND MISCELLANY

I
The tough sea island sheep
towards dawn break up our sleep;
may they attend likewise
the death we do this day put off—
with the faint, fog-cracked cough
of half surprise.
II
Brown in their summer cowls
above the tidemarks live
the weasel mouse and owl
from the second of breath
to the second of death
and never raise an eye
lest they grow fugitive
(so watching likewise I)
and, salt sea-mortified,
there be no room to hide
no earth in which to die.
III
One hundred feet of cliff,
two eagles over that;
climbing, that nightmare, If,
got on my back and sat—
that hand and foot might know
two eagles were, not nearer
but like the sea below
iminctly sheerer.
I, clutching the cliff,
embraced the nightmare, If.
IV
Nothing moves much but the tide
in this mid island thoroughfare;
stillness of rock on either side,
a gull here and a white heron there.

And the gull skims when the tide falls
over the herring down to sea,
and the han breaks heavy wings and calls,
slow-vanishing, thrice raucously.

What moved in me left with the birds,
and left one thing to think upon:
so I, in three unspeakable words,
    cry thrice my own oblivion.

Note: Second stanza, third line: "han" or "great han" is the Maine coast familiar form for heron. Hamlet has "handsaw"; other forms are "hernshaw" and "hern."
V
One grey and foaming day
I looked from my lee shore
landwards and across the bay:
my eyes grew small and sore.

Low in the low sea-waves
the coastline sank from sight;
the viewless, full sea-graves
stood open like the night:

(sea waters are most bare
when darkness spreads her trawl,
the sea-night winds her snare
either for ship or soul).

Once along this coast
my fathers made their sail
and were with all hands lost,
outweathered in a gale.

Now from long looking I
have come on second sight,
there where the lost shores lie
the sea is breeding night.
VI
Here are we in the blown sea-spray,
quick salt in the breath we breathe,
sea-violence strikes the day,
and her soft falling underneath.

But do not think I hold you so
because I love you or because
the billows with their come and go
toss us together like two straws.

No. I am afraid lest you
be bare as I am, lest the sea take
from you as me, and then you, too,
stare naked where the first seas break.
VII

*Half-tide Ledge*

Sunday the sea made morning worship, sang
Venite, Kyrie, and a long Amen,
over a flowing cassock did put on
glittering blindness, surplice of the sun.
Towards high noon her eldest, high-run tide
rebelled at formal song and in the Sanctus
made heavy heavy mockery of God,
and I, almost before I knew it, saw
the altar ledges of the Lord awash.
These are the obsequies I think on most.
VIII
Some days the lobstermen
make me their company;
riding the sea is then
arduous intimacy.

Observe old Danny Watts
reach with a rumbling laugh
after a ducking pot
and hook it with a gaff,
untie and empty, bait,
and with one body-turn
cast the netted crate
over the side, astern.

—The morning's business
too quickly overcome,
my lubber's earning is
to have been made at home.
IX

*Mirage*

The wind was in another country, and the day had gathered to its heart of noon the sum of silence, heat, and stricken time. Not a ripple spread. The sea mirrored perfectly all the nothing in the sky. We had to walk about to keep our eyes from seeing nothing, and our hearts from stopping at nothing. Then most suddenly we saw horizon on horizon lifting up out of the sea’s edge a shining mountain sun-yellow and sea-green; against it surf flung spray and spume into the miles of sky. Somebody said mirage, and it was gone, but there I have been living ever since.
X

Sea-Odalisque

East of the eastern ledge a hundred yards
the haddock feed on rising tides, and there
I choose a round warm room, walled in fog,
and let my dory anchor go. I hear
only Nash Island’s friendly signal bell
and sometimes, distant, from Petit Manan,
a lonely horn dying out, lost, and dull,
creeping along the waters under the fog.
Though I have fish enough for chowder, still
the oars lie straight and quiet along the thwarts,
and likewise I. There is no hurry on this sea.
Languorous kelp and seaweed drift me by,
three porpoises whirl up their flukes astern,
a seal emerges from the grey ground swell,
regards me slowly, slowly submarines.
The boat makes slowly north and south, slowly
rises from trough to crest, as slowly settles.
This is the lulling of a lullaby.

The tide of hours comes to its full, and I
wonder why men abuse their flesh with mermaids,
image sea-nymphs and such like fictive things.
There is the sea herself, her long low swell,
in my own room, spreading her lazy thighs.
XI

All day my dog runs up and down
the fury of the surf-line, meeting
the crumpled havoc of each breaker
with the cowed fury of his own greeting.

There is in his retreating bark
what I feel only after dark.

When we get home he will, I think,
deaf with the sea's indifferent roar,
vociferate the morning mailman
with harsher fury than before.
XII
With evening the fog grew brown
behind me on the browner land;
grew grayer where the sea was gray,
grew and moved, like a closing hand.

Three shag flew seaward by
to gain low-water slack
above some deep-sea shoal;
pursuing eyes went black.

Had it been clear I had been still,
the shag beat past and nothing stirred,
but in the hollow of this grey hand
all moved, like an unspoken word;

moved without motion, moved
like a reaching hand, down
upon the fallen tide:
moved till I thought to drown.

A fishboat made the head and turned.
The fog seemed less, somehow withdrawn
before the brawl of gulls astern;
waving, I felt the great hand gone.
XIII

*Seas Incarnadine*

Wind was not, flat was, but was imminent.
The long grey swells reddened with the dawn,
I saw the black spar-buoy on Leighton's shoal
lifted on red water and dip from sight.
The breaking of the seas below was dull.
I on my cliff stod up in all my blood
confessing the sudden murder in my heart
to the dark tangle of rock and spray beneath.
Had I friend there I would have cast him down.

Red vanished and the shrunk sun sky-lost.
Like mountain night wind was, sheer-fallen, black.
I could not see nor hear nor breathe, but held,
sea-crucified, back-nailed against granite,
wind-fast, tight-drenched, flat-flailed, a sacrifice
vainly surrendered to unpropitiable seas.

Seas would not take me. All I saw of glory,
where twenty fathoms broke gigantic black
backs to shrieking smother, fathoms in air,
made me run out of blood entirely. I was
the only prisoner in a world set free.
XIV
Where shall I go then
if all I wish is going,
what must I know then
if all I need is knowing?

Sea answer is sea-deep.
Look at the sea and sleep,
ever waves are furling
over and under and back
furling unfurling still furling
over and deeper and black;
look at the sea look down
under the tidal sweep
dark waters are
a still black star
and drown
XV
What is treasure for
if I am always more
than any treasure, less
than any nothingness?

Sea answer is sea-sand.
Look at the tide's bare hand
then at the flotsam trove
it scatters in this cove,
a melting jellyfish
a sailor’s wooden dish
and an old galley stove
content on the bare sand.
XVI
Pray for a night-storm
pray for an open sea.
Hidden upon the land
the body will be warm,
while the soul, cold and free,
raises a bare hand
over a full sea.
JUDAS PRIEST

I
Come let us gather up the hated men,
the true outsiders: those with tireless eyes
that watch new bloodshed waste god’s death again;
those with the fault of memory likewise:
all those who shun the dogma’s dreadful weight
and know the ignominy of applause,
who see the plastic strategy of state
resolved into the tactics of a Cause.

These are the printed faces none can read
who feel god loves them most: these stand aside,
free creatures of necessity that seed
the slow words out: Behold what gods have died.
Though the blown blossom petals in thin air
the seed survives, the grown thing in despair.
II
We who have had no part in hurried act,
no share in the willed hydra, hope, shed blood
no less, no less wear out our fortitude
with sweat and rage to keep the natural pact;
we too have seen the unemployed attacked,
the forced, foul ill of scabs, seen hunger lewd
in bright eyes on the pot of terror glued:
seen, in the mirror, each his own soul sacked.

Let them be desperate that hope, let them
be absolute and sweeten violence;
let them by rote and frantic apothegm
swear we outsiders earn but Judas’ pence.
—Yet Judas made a mirror of his will
where both the horror and the hope stood still.
Judas, not Pilate, had a wakened mind
and knew what agony must come about;
while Pilate washed his hands of all mankind,
he saw necessity past Pilate’s doubt.
So driven mad did he alone indict
the waste the terror the intolerable loss,
the near abyss of darkness in the light,
and made a live tree of a wooden cross.

Where then are we?—we lookers-on of art,
outsiders by tormented, wilful choice,
condemned to image death in each live heart
and kiss it so—and how shall we rejoice?

But if men prophesy Gethsemane
regardless, there must some regard the tree.
IV
O comrades of a simpler faith, think now, it is compassion in us that prevails: beyond the dogma is the sweating brow and in the living wood the driven nails. This Judas knew and forced himself outside; wherefore the ignominious act occurred not by mob's cry but by the final pride, the terrible compassion of the word.

What is it shivers in the sun, beheld above an early breadline in late spring, O comrades! but the human dark that felled, for Judas, safety in imagining.
   Who but a Judas, a willed looker-on, can cherish light until the dark be gone.
VIEWS OF BOSTON COMMON
AND NEAR BY

I
Sometimes, as if forewarned, before we die
colon bacilli half-eat us on the sly
and rot the rest. On Chardon Street this night,
between outrageous heart and sober eye,
the breadline slowly inchworms out of sight.

II
These are my enemies, the men who doze
the noontime out along the asphalt path,
pale pupae in the sun. My midnight grows,
as I lie small and naked in my bath,
like theirs, new prey to every wind that blows.

III
O beggar beggar try your art on me.
False insolence will strike on falser pride.
Be sure though that as palm leaves palm you see
that you no more than I can ever hide
our unsuccourable inward beggary.

IV
At every subway port a Sally stands
collecting for the poor a brief thanksgiving.
Observe her feet in newspapers, her hands
in woolen gloves. Such charity demands
even of dead hopes that they go on living.

V

The Burial Ground
Only the dead are faithful, for their trust,
despite the iron fence, the iron doors,
and living grass, like them makes vacant dust.
Lie still, lie quiet, O my ancestors:
you cannot rise, and we the living must.
WITNESS OF LIGHT

See all we see
weakness and strength
without feud without faith
mirror the mystery
light in the light

See all we see
horror in hope
torment in power
form without scope
faults for a tragedy
lightning in light

See all we see
boredom of lust
desiring desire
the terror of justice
resorting to fire

See all we see
the breath in its flight
the oppression of peace
the hunger for bloodshed
and rape as release
false home in the night

Humbled from confusion
the cumulus words:
O charitable heart
see all we see
the witnessing art
light in the light
OCTOBER FROST

The comfortable noise long reading makes brimming within the inward ear, at midnight stopped like a sharp cough, like a warm garment taken off. I heard the kitchen slowly creak, unsettling all its ancient gear, and saw beyond the lamplight loom the further darkness of the room. Life was a draining out, until, need and custom joining will, I went outside into the night where in the moon the frost was bright.

Cold in the temples, cold lifting the rooted hair, it is the new cold quickening the richened air.

Across the mudflats of Flat Bay the tide was moonwards making way, and on the water's rising edge among the eelgrass and salt sedge the endless rustle and soft clucks of a thousand feeding ducks made a warm noise about my ears. Quiet, I crept between the tiers of young white birch. But a stick cracked under my foot and a duck quacked loudly in the comfortable night. Like wind breaking, their thousand-flight soared up. Transfixed on the bright ground I filled with the full frost of sound.
STERILES RITORNELLES

I saw a face rise up
made honest by the dark
shadow of its hat;
what animal out of the ark
but would continue chaste
had its opposite a face like that?

—How have I seen this promise waste—
treasure of company,
complement in thought,
the cord of unity
binding the public deed—
spent, bewildered, broken—gone to seed.

How have I seen a smile unsought
startle the mystery,
make plain how all this action ends.
From this his gestured generosity
I think him such an actor as, may be,
might lay down a hated wife for friends.
PETIT MANAN POINT

At last from the thick mile of brush we six
came out to sea-light in our summer tan,
came out on the last flat hand
of seaward land,
issued in eager company
on the full solitude of Petit Manan.

This land is falling
into the sea
is sliding is sinking
receding is bleeding
year by year
is drinking the deep
killing salt
of the sea

within the natural seawall’s granite rise
this that is marsh and soft bog to our feet,
with blue-flag waving and creeping cranberries,
onec grew three hundred acres of black birch,
their backs to windward, and bent hackmatack.
Regard the red wood-earth torn bare, and there:—
sea-strangled, gibbeted against the sky,
the last grey splintered trunks and crippled thumbs.
Ghostly, these gestures are beyond repair.
—And here, upwards upon the sea, a snarl
of huge ship timbers and stove-in lobster pots,
great stuff and small, a thicket of sea-slain
a thousand stumbled yards in length, ten wide.
Here one could lay impossible keel and frame
for half the hulls upon the Gulf of Maine.

Muscles a month made limber
in sun and earthly use
went dull and loose;
like the shivered ship timber
southeast to south southwest
muscle and bone made wreckage in my breast.

Without counsel or despair
or any hope of haven
(behold like a long last breath
in this flat hand
the laying on of death)
each made a separate
hard path his own
among the snarled rubble of wood and stone
to a small eminence, and sat;
and was himself, alone, driven
into the place of bones.

Ask other lands redress
for injured imagination,
deracinated flesh;
pray other lands for peace
on wounded memories.

Beware this bleak elation.

This is the flattened land
this is the touched horizon.
Stand up. Assent. Await
the mountainous white waste
of the great storm to come
THREE SONGS AT EQUINOX

I
I in my stillness cried aloud,
keep that man blind,
leave him his slavery,
who from brooding on his kind
memory out of mind
presides a sightless effigy
upon the night-dark streaming crowd;
have mercy on that mole
whose darkness is his soul.

II
What of the active hand, I cried,
driven by dreamless will
to add unconscious pride
with each access of skill;
that gains great learning
whether by sun's caress
or remote burning
under cool flesh.

Grant that it last not out its use
nor hang a broken tool
upon a winter nail,
but come suddenly to its end
without memory as false friend
or hope's abuse.

III
He whom this stillness breeds
rejoices with a roving eye
on thistles blown to seed,
on hills against the sky,
until the sun's late haze
the wild, neap-tidal air goes cold:
hill and thistle equally old.

May those eyes, still bright,
come at the last,
day being past,
to see their own night.
THE COUGH

He
Suppose I coughed; would I because my ribs and stomach give with each explosion, live more surely in your inward eye? Do small infirmities raise knowledge, or stir sympathies?

She
Cough while I think.—It is like this: a pattern at the panes assures me that it rains. The difference is, between that patterning and you, unless you stop you’ll have me coughing too.

He
Yet when I speak you hear in the flat sound the singing sense, and are full audience of all I turn in my mind’s ear. Consider, a cough should sing as clear, if equalled in imagining.

She
You have a sad philosophy. Will nothing teach you true:—of all that passes through our intimacy, only the shared thing endures. Speaking, you speak my words as well as yours.

He
We speak God’s words, no doubt, and in communion drink God’s wine, never yours, nor mine. But the god lessens and dies out, the chancel rail turns trough with use, and the bread stales. I’d rather cough.

She
Cough if you will, your purview's blind.
The magic of old phrases
in rehearsal but amazes
more the full mind:
and the deep hush within them comes,
hushing the voice, like the hush after drums.

_He_
Address your homilies
elsewhere. You'll have me thinking, Madam,
myself a fig for Adam,
and you, with your pomposities,
a wooly-nightgowned Eve:
when I'll do all my coughing in my sleeve.

_She_
Forgive yourself your rhetoric:
none else can understand
the sleight of his own hand,
or be self-sick.
—Words verge on flesh, and so we may,
someday, be to ourselves the things we say.

_He_
Mayhap. But God forbid
there seem more beauty in a word
in that it's said, and heard,
than lies in the still body hid.
Seeing full flesh advance,
and live, to your mere word I'd cough askance.
PHASELLUS ILLA

This little boat you see, my friends, has not, 
as once Catullus' pinnance could repeat, 
a history of deep-sea peril sought; 
for her no honoured peace, no earned retreat. 
Too narrow for her length in beam, unstable 
and unseaworthy, her strakes and transom leak; 
although no landsman, even, would call her able, 
I float her daily in our tidal creek.

I do not need the bluster and the wail 
in this small boat, of perilous high seas 
or the blown salt smarting in my teeth; 
if the tide lift and weigh me in his scale 
I know, and feel in me the knowledge freeze, 
how smooth the utter sea is, underneath.
SCARABS FOR THE LIVING

I

Quem Dixere Chaos

Each finding fleshly piety accursed,
no wonder Christian ages, in despair,
saw God with neither flesh nor winey hair.
O Aphrodite, Dionysus, spare
from my sight, him who came before ye, first.

II

Soldier, consider well these animals,
the lion, lamb, and rat, and how each falls:
indifferent goat of human sacrifice.
Dear Sir, on thee this weasel glory lies:
to be with music ratted in blind walls.

III

Beat on, O colding heart, beat firm, beat true,
until at last your own night throbless come
and the slow warmth you lost, that warmed me through,
shall warm your memory over, coffined home.
Meanwhile I coffin cold I have of you.

IV

O Eros, who so long gave unabashed
the outward-flowing, uncorrupted joy
and were less seminal god than generous boy,
why worm you inwards now, self-gnawed, self-lashed—
must I be one of them the gods destroy!

V

O sailor sailor tell me why
though in the seawine of your eye
I see nothing dead and nothing die
I know from the stillness seething there
my heart's hope is my soul's despair.

VI

To meditate upon the tiger, turn
your human eyes from his past-human stare;
beyond his cage a pigeon tops an urn,
beyond the pigeon falls the twilight air,
and there, steadfast, he sees a viewless lair.

VII

Lay down one hand before you like a tool
and let the other, in your mind, grow strange;
then let the strangers meet. Who but a fool
or a passionate man, thinks loss is blood-exchange,
if the cold hand should warm and the hot cool!

VIII

Think now, O rediscovered, old-faced friend,
what bourne it is of which we cannot tell,
our silence being its only dividend.
Think now, it is the same upspringing well
plumbed in the beginning-word, drunk in the end.

IX

Hermes the helper praise, who had approved
the rainbow prayer and sent, as godly slaking,
lips that were heaven-wet, earth-warm. Awaking,
soft from the long fall, praise him for taking,
his own, the dream whence help had been removed.

X

May you who have been watched, observe
that as watched stars fade and the sea
thins to a line illimitably
it is the same bottomless reserve
I fasten on in you, you me.

XI

Within this windless covert silence drops
leaf by leaf and birches make bare bones;
a startled woodcock's whistling flight new-stops
the wind beyond the woods, and I, alone,
feel my still flight trembling into stone.

XII

There is, besides the warmth, in this new love—
besides the radiance, the spring—the chill
that in the old had seemed the slow, the still
amounting up of that indifferent will
in which we die. I keep last winter's glove.
XIII
Become a woman whom I could not know
she turned, a blight upon her own renown
(I too a stranger suddenly ingrown)
and gave, wooden and like a mallet blow,
one shout that brought obscene horizons down.

XIV
Pride is the thing outside,
pride is the itching hide;
the proud man out of doors
goes naked in his sores.
Forgive him that he shrinks inside.

XV
Smugness is the first reward
befalls impatient certainty—
your world and you are in accord
of mutual unreality
at rest; the last is being bored.

XVI
Oh, I was honest in the womb
where I had neither time nor room
nor any secret hope to hide.
Now there are love and work this side
of honesty, two hopes that lied.

XVII
Oh, love is lusty blind
but wakened is abased;
in darkness kind finds kind;
in daylight, double-faced,
each frees the inner waste
umbrageous dark confined.

XVIII
Once in the monarch darkness, you, by blood
at mountain height exalted, and wine-wooed,
wine of the closing eye, made body’s need
spill on the blinded moment the soul’s seed.
Which was it, soul or body, was withstood?
XIX
Humiliation is an apple-tree
with worms; humility the wasting sea.
Eat of the fruit as dished. You know the look,
you wear it, of Adam whom the truth forsook.
The proof of Eden is Gethsemane.

XX
The chickadee-dee-dee is not a bird
like stilted heron fishing minnie pools
that in their fleeing shriek the sky like fools;
the chickadee (dee-dee) is most a word
to keep the thicket warm when summer cools.

XXI
It is the coward in me will not rest,
but eddying against the coming time
exhausts the prayer for safety dime by dime.
It is the coward sees the double crime:
where blood unleashed is nonetheless oppressed.

XXII
The subaltern resentments, waste and need,
made hanging bother at my door, a crape
for fusty hope of which the dead are freed;
and now I also, love: you are the gap
within me, paradise and no escape.

XXIII
It is the slow encroachment, word by word,
of sleep upon the wakened mind, the slow
manoeuvre of unseemly vertigo,
whereby disease in order is inferred;
and in the sleep a blotting fall of snow.

XXIV
Quiet the self, and silence brims like spring:
the soaking in of light, the gathering
of shadow up, after each passing cloud,
the green life eating into death aloud,
the hum of seasons; all on beating wing.

What of the beauty that these hands have held,  
is there no help that they preserve it still,  
and can be seized, as when great silence welled,  
more than a memory, almost at will?  
Is there no help, if I see in these eyes  
the drunken weather of the headlong heart,  
the radiance of wordless intimacies,  
brim to the flood? It is no help to part.

You, Michael, were but righting wrong with wrong.  
Why should I pocket my imploring hands,  
why seal my inner ear to inmost song  
or quench the radiance in which she stands?  
Such would be parting: an insensate night  
that perjures, with its pain, the soul's delight.
SIMULACRUM DEAE

Having admired, and in admiring sired desire, the firm long line from waist to knee, having by accident and warmth of wine suddenly let my eyes go free in hers, I stopped, seizing within me the stilled second before the threatened thunderclap occurs.

Slowly I turned, thunder about my ears, the suffering of wonder in my eyes; she who had been half handsome stranger, half casual friend, that second had become a face for desperate homage, and amends.

I looked and she was newly flesh, her arms intensive, calm, and round, her eyes likewise fresh with the first ease of intimacy burned through their own darkness to the light; and I began to think with lips and eyelids, with all the tender motions of the body, sharp or confused, in loin or fingertips, that may, guided, encouraged, firm the mind to meet the crisis of another’s being; and with the greater, aching tenderness shaking in unspoken words, unseen seeing, wherein there is no purpose or disguise, only a blind mid discovering a blind.

—How sweet the torment in this structure joins the hope that monuments its own despair. The trembling animal inside my loins inside my heart my head my soul rose up to search the inscrutable fastness of her being, to seize only the face that was not there.
PONE METUM...

Be not afraid, Cerinthus, the gods harm
not those who wear each other's love for charm—
or so Tibullus wrote in secret dread—
but those who venerate a passion dead.

Be not afraid. Did Goethe fear
when with the sun the day's love set
to see the moon's new love appear?

Be not afraid.
The agony to be possessed
to hide and give hiding
to be naked undismayed
to find at last abiding
the mind's comfort and the blood's rest
without let:
all this shall seem bravura yet
and the slow charm be lost.

O my Cerinthus, then be not afraid
though all your being crumple and come unmade.
Be not afraid, if in the great fright,
for all the ravage and the sack
and the black frost,
you find on a moonless night
yourself intact.
RIVER-WALK

O friend of shadow, friend of brimming silence, come walk with me, come slowly by my side. We shall, if we walk long enough, and turn as the sun turns us, burning in our eyes, at last see the red river fold that sun to rest, and have ourselves such peace of earth as evens out those strangers, night and day.

—Did I say peace? Exhaustion is not peace, only an incapacity, a fraud whereby the flesh betrays itself to sleep waking to unrelenting replenishment. Death, or its equivalent in knowledge, that is the peace our blood and bowels bid for; that is the peace drenches the checked heart, checked by a face, a word, by wind or rain, by the self coming fully upon itself.

Yet walk with me, be by my side, and speak. It is a compact then? You will be free?—and talkative?—and easy in your flesh?—all these are needful to the speaking sense. And you will walk so gently on the turf the earth will move a little upwards, gently fall a little with every last footfall.

There’s more than that though here. There are the birds, maybe a shining hundred redwinged blackbirds singing among the birches till we come. They did not know and could not sing our song, nor is their silence our despair. We are (in this desert judged, impeached, identified) the straight shadows of separated stars.

O friend of shadow, friend of silence, speak. (Look you do see us firming in the sun: a bright looming in air that hesitates withdraws returns verges upon the flesh and is the shadow in the whitest light.) Speak now: of the harsh April grass spirting out of the burned land, of the winter dust
already loosening along the road.
I do beseech you put behind us all
that dark silence from which we came. Speak now:
Conjure out of the ragged black of crows,
sentinelled and awkward upon the alders,
at least the gloss of ravens; let your voice
fall soft among those sunken willows, bringing
their generation's promise of slow dying,
at least for us, to tardy bloom. Speak now,
or we shall hear the bottom of our silence echoing.
DEDICATIONS

I

Ripeness is All
I knew that lust would pall,
blood would not always run
a ripe and bursting ball
down to the aching groin.

I had no need to will
passion on passion spent
if common life could fill
vigorous hearts content.

I who have treasured less
the fury and the foam
than devout tenderness
studied out at home,

this night have slowly heard
unhappy ripeness reach
from heart to groin to word
drenching each with each.
II

*Wind and Weather*

The heart exaggerates. I have not lost
despite the wind and weather, no, nor shall,
more than the heart must lose, no more at most
than when a thief cries thief, no more at all.
What can be shared seems never a full share
until by justifiable grand theft
each in his guilt has tenderness to spare.
Only of what I stole am I bereft.

That which was once, is now again my own.
It was my own affection stolen back
that seemed so sweet, the known returned unknown;
I gave that I might measure my own lack,
she hers. The rest was social wind and weather:
the storm that forced still holds our lives together.
III

The Spear

There is no recourse for the mind
in rhymed, disjointed prose
nor luck in self-sent valentines
although the arrow and the heart
be redder than the Virgin's rose.

Salvation is a salmon speared,
the ancient Fisher cried,
sprung from the spring torrent
without right or warrant
safe from the great safety of the sea.

Leave me my Odyssey,
the living soul's hyperbole,
peril in which to hide,
peace for my naked eyes.
O let my heart
that spurns satieties
be living hooked from the fresh flood
but let my soul rehearse
without benefit or curse
of a saviour's blood
its difficult and dangerous art.

I shall be dead and rot
a full four-seasoned year
until my last beginning is rubbed out
in the deep-bit Christmas frost
before my ghost leaps ripe
for the Fisher's spear.
IV

Of Mind’s Silvering

There is a mirror the mind’s silvering
perfects moment to moment in slow eyes.
Looked in they show no tarnish of surprise,
resentment, or despair; their mirroring
takes and returns, without rendering
the murky homage of shared injuries:
there is, before each image shifts or dies,
knowledge without contact unbewildering.

Or so we plead—we who have married reason
on desperate cause, when the heart’s cause was lost,
to live without wealth and without cost
free of blood vengeance and blood treason
until, reason a proud deserter too,
the light the night at last break both ways through.
V

The Witnessing Eye

Serenity comes not
from reason or the mind's control,
only an anguish of things forgot
investing a blank soul,
only an eunuch’s love
frantic in the holy grove,
only a widowed thought.

Ending unending
giant immersion
flood-lost dispersion
the seizure the release
the torment the blending
the enemy, the peace

O saviour the shadow
the having of blood of life of light
to give out, assent to, and lose,
the saving engraving memory.
This be serenity

to the witnessing eye:
the abyss, the rejoicing by night.
A LABYRINTH OF BEING

I
I saw a boy, once, put a thinking hand
across eternity (the pasture bars)
slowly and touch, almost, the horse's nose;
and the horse baulk, then nuzzle patiently.
So I would enter a friend's house. So I,
each in its time, would enter love, would die.
II
Because one face had meant
exile for a year
to manual labours of the heart,
exile from the mind’s content
the mind’s slow-moving certain gear,
he lost the patience of life’s art
and settled in that corner
where the soul is disciplined and taught
by memory the mourner
how much more bitter than dead beauty is
the funeral business
of the holy ghost of thought.
III
My dear, flesh is the eagerness
of the full heart to speak, forgive
if it may seem to leave
as much to curse as bless.
What dumb man with a new-found tongue
but speaks out wildly and too long?
IV

Breakfast we hardly share, but spar for peace; we still are heavy in the night's adventure,—the long travel of sleep, the soul's release from sign and countersign, from time's indenture; hence in our orisons ask, not God's grace but immediate courage to meet a wakened face.
Three silences made him a single word:
the footloose lover’s agony of eye,
the heartfast husband’s peace; these joined the third,
the straight silence of something about to die
that something else, no different, might live.
They sat in silence on their separate chairs
knowing that silence would be positive
when they should climb their nightly Goodnight stairs.

He spoke it first. Is it ourselves that go
from us? ourselves that to ourselves add up,
because this child shall be, to zero?—No.
(Her voice was from a void that broke.) We stop:
we are not us: not dear and dear: we are
to this child’s sun the silent morning star.
VI
We prayed our sleep
might reawake us
deepest night to deeper;
behold our sleep unmake us.

Dark even in darkness
rose that secret sleeper,
loom of our fathers' dust,
he who is now our keeper.

We lay in peace exhausted,
calmed with each other's need;
we spent for heart's delight
and spent our living seed.

We warmed the darkness through,
we sought eternal hiding;
now if this child be born
it is our own death, tiding.
VII
This marriage has insatiable, sad eyes
which looking once, enough, are yet unsatisfied,
needs must still peer until long peering prize
mere peering priceless—vaingloring pride.
What devil’s here? It is the marriage knot
our eyes, fast-craven, crave us to untie
then see what’s tied, what’s not.—Though gordian-cut,
still devil-tied, it snubs satiety.

Look further and there is no knot, because
there never was one till we said it so
reciting a daft dozen of old saws.
That devil’s absolute for action though:
I look again, immediate this, not far—
I am, she is, quick glance, caught breath: we are.
VIII
Because the elm-tree buds are red
in sunlight, yellow brown in shade,
I think not of a living thing—
my dog my wife and most myself—
but that I think of it as dead.

Because the harrowed land is black
and the wet wales ashine like flesh
in sunlight, dull blue steel in shade,
this much I do expect and hate,
I shall be fertile so when dead—
fertile and indiscriminate.
IX
If out of disappointment I let go,
losing the skill of silence, a low cry,
it's not that courtesy is gone, not so:
the formal life goes on though substance die.
You may, since learning blood exacts blood-cost,
set up a bloodless tit for tat, commanding
the tin parade at will—content that most
intimacy stops short with understanding.

In me the substance lies not dead but hidden;
nourished from beat to beat in the heart's night,
lies still and hushed till it again be bidden
forth to the shocked silence of the light.

Thence, where untimely thou art thee'd and thou'd,
beyond word-knowledge, broke that cry aloud.
X
This is a bold thing we see,
mixing our shadows in the sun;
I look at you, you look at me,
and swear our shadows may be one.

This is a grave thing we do,
nerve to nerve we faintly bleed;
you look at me, I look at you.
Our souls go early so to seed.

This is a dark thing we do,
face the darkness side by side;
you look at me, I look at you.
Now there's nowhere else to hide.
XI
My friend, what brothers us in each?—I take,
most mine out of the wordling worlds we bled,
not life, but what is takeable, the dead.
I say the dead. Things cannot sleep or wake
nor grow nor lessen, upleap nor ever slack,
which have been changed between two selves. I said
the dead—what’s not but was. This struggle-bread,
the pressed wafer of knowledge, this I break.

I eat the past, the matter we have been,
and so eat god, a fast; devour my part
in you: Yet you’re untouched. You say that’s so
of me?—my dead selves only you draw in
your often eye and seldom smile? Live heart,
we walk the earth ahead of all we know.
XII

*Indubitable Venus*

After each debauchery
flesh that I serve and foster
sinks crippled on one knee
and prays a godly wraith
to resurrect and bolster
the blind urge of faith.

A snowman is more nothingness than snow,
passion once shaped should be imagined dead.
Let then my body, grovelling, believe,
the soft-earned discipline of self-deceit
is the one mastery it may achieve.
I that would judge, more than my body, know
(as a cold hope is desperate to entreat)
a cold lust is a dreadful thing to bed.

I who can doubt
and doubting earn my keep,
who can rejoicing weather out
the irony of intellectual storm
and stilled desire,
doubt not my dreaming loins require
(indubitable Venus on each night’s tide of sleep)
bravado of feeling warm.
XIII

*By Luckless Blood*

Soft to the river falls the millet field
moulding and giving to the wind, as might
an ordinary woman slowly yield
by moonlight her own summer to the night.
Alas, this tardy love that comes elate,
irradiant sun-flash on cresting seas,
invades and wastes, as if by chosen spate
not luckless blood, my quiet granaries.

I am at loss, all manners and no man,
al aching breath, all queasy near the heart,
the fond brain vacillating plan to plan:
all torment's here, dull hope, and under-smart—
 unless, O sweetest harvest, sleeping flood,
the old love grow in me and find me good.
A F U N E R A L  F O R  A  F E W  S T I C K S

Three Fragments from an Early Poem. 1925

I

I sit here, and this man sitting beside me,
Both thinking, thinking a form upon the world.
Here in this hillside place this ancient man,
Whom I in my own might have dreamed alive,
This man and I, and we alone, guarding
A fire, and he feeding the flames with sticks.
His weathered, earnest face, his earnest voice:
Stuff of my thought. Of these I made a god.
—But did my heart beat truly when I dreamed him?

It is no matter. I have walked with him
All day, and heard him speak, and penetrate
That secret sense which lurks beneath the skin.
I saw him stare, when he had finished talking,
Gravely across the bare brown hills, and felt
The everlasting quiet of the land
Drawn up into my veins, a numbing sap.
Then he and I were breathless images
Rooted eternally into that stillness.

I heard him speak, reduce his flesh to voice:
"If on a word I hang the sum of time,
If on a name I nail the sign of years—
All wisdom passes on my breath, and dies."
The voice snaps in the memory, a vain
Recoil. "Sweetness is only to the worm."

I made this man an oracle, to hear
The stroke of being, beat on the heart’s gong;
Gave him the colour of a god, may be,
That he might make the godly seem more real,
That he might sheathe the shadow of our dream
With human flesh and human memory.
Being matured among the dead, he sprang
Among the living old, and glitters where
Old thought becomes a sense, the sense a voice.

II
I have pulled up this man from darkness, singing
In the long aisles within my mind, singing
Upon the everlasting years, singing
Till my whole being grows giddy on the song.
(A song of timber cut and timber burned,
Of sticks which beat the earth before they burned.)
I have imagined him above the game
Of memory, beyond the treachery
Of fancy, real: a thought grown mountainous,
Gigantic, become a gesture and a man.
I made him so his eyes might meet the sun,
And in that blazing mirror lose his image,
Then stare us through with blue, sunbrightened eyes,—
Yet never cringe among our deadly shadows,
But rather greet each shadow separately
And call its name, and burn a stick for it.
I'd therefore have him choose out of his pack
One stick for me, and while he burned it up
Have him sing out those words which had been mine
From my own mouth had I had song to sing them.

III

Again dark pours; flesh on the bestial floor.
—And if I chuckle sitting on this ledge?
(The seeds of laughter burst in stony fruit.)
I sit here and my god beside me drinking.
"Drinking drinking drinking
Sups sips quaffs twelve bottles a case."
What have I said?—Bring up your god on whiskey
And feed the flames on whiskey. Say that’s justice,
And say that ends it. Chuckle once again.
And the flesh reels and shakes with voice. You lose
Order, and time is vanquished; lose all faith,
Die out, depart this world. Still in the head
Within the glutted brain, a film or mirror
Holding the world most steadfast. Say that's justice.
—I sit here, sit here. Shall I muse?—collect
Records of infamy?—maybe display
The ruck of gravestones I have left behind me
Upon the thin curtain of memory
In lifeless view?—myself my audience
Hearing in my unprofitable laughter
My spoken epitaph?—A dullard's ending.
I sit here.—But in the court of bones what mercy,
The judgments of a dusty wit. "O you
Who sit there prisoner at the bar, you
Who squirm in the stuffy scarf of memory,
Beware all human gifts. By this discharged . . .
The Court in consideration of your offence
Awards the palm to youth;—that twenty years
Spread out through ninety husky Æons."
(You could have floored me with a beery breath.)
O dusty Judge O Wisdom of this Court
The worms are slavering within your robes,
And by this sentence O mine enemy
I gain a name, The Worm Among The Courts.
. . . But some one grinned. An aggravated case,
Her aggravating legs. (The Worm swelled up
To go to Court.) Besides, the grass was deep:
"The Court in . . . thirty days, one hundred dollars . . ."
And is my father in this bar room? Look
Under your feet. O father kiss my feet
And close those marble eyes and wipe that face
Battered from a thousand buck-and-wings.
John Doe and Richard Roe, the bench of bones:
O Dicky Dicky darling hold your tongue.
The musty mockery of broken bottles.
—Get off those swinging doors.

I said I'd chuckle. So much for epigraph.
I sit here with my god, a case between us;
A garrulous antique choirboy of a god.
See no pale nymphs to-day; nor homely wives
Spreading acceptable bodies in the dark;
No dogface demon women snare my legs:—
I snatch the pure mirror of shadow, enter
Among invisible reflections, emerge
And see my selfsame face stare back at me.
—How shall I profit here, when this my god
Wipes out even the dream?
How shall I prosper when my god brings up
A bulging drunken monster of ourselves
And sets him murderously before my face?
"May be he comes, this man, an answerer
To all your hope. See where he lurches past
Shaking the foul red staff before him. Hear
From the raw lips the words that bubble up
And spatter on the air so that the air
Crackles and smarts on the tautened eardrums.
What issue thence in sign or warming?—This:
In him words lose all lien upon the mind
And cloy the flesh like lice.—This image swells:
Some wench puffed up with a hundred measures of
Such slime as his staff spurts, took you to bed
And stewed you in her sweat until you rotted
Inwardly. So he mumbles from a mouth
Stuffed with such memory. Look you, his face
A metamorphosis of yours and mine,
Another mirror to our stricken souls."

Towards morning once I heard him speak most slowly,
Whose body seemed the last thing on the earth.
"Put flesh, all human flesh, away, for flesh
But binds the fever on the bone and sheathes
The naked thought in a live winding-sheet.
Put blood, all human blood, away, for blood
Is but the sweat that your heart’s agony
Drains from the bitter virtue of the bone.
And with the flesh put sorrow, with the blood,
Desire, away. Treasure the sweetened bone.
Nothing but wind speaks in your gaping vents.
—Do this, for you are old, and memory
Bloats you, obesity on ancient bone,
Sorrow the bland accomplice of desire.
Do this, for you are old. But hope that some
Miraculous bright day your bones ascend
A glittering shaft of dust into the sun."
—So in his voice my body thinned away.
The Second World

1942
THE SECOND WORLD

WHO that has sailed by star
on the light night-air,
first hand on the tiller,
second, the nibbling sheet,

who, looking aloft and then aback,
has not one moment lost
in the wind's still eye
his second world
and the bright star
before the long shudder fills on
the windward tack?
MISSA VOCIS

PRIEST-mannerly the mind,
that president mask,
gives dogsight to the new blind,
priest-mannerly unknowing
what mastering ear-task
keeps the great churn going.

O unmannerable heart,
monk-dancer, be still,
be leashless, apart:
the sounding, the growing
unabettable will
sets the great churn going.

Lie chidden, lie dark,
in the reserved deep
lie prone, lie stark:
the unprayable flowing,
the vast sluiceage of sleep,
sets the great churn going.

In the wringing of new sound,
chance flowering to choice,
old words in full round
in-breathing, thrall-throwing:
the mass of new voice
keeps the great churn going.
UNA VITA NUOVA

THAT crazy wretch got up
and donned sea-going clothes.
"Tomtit", says he,"tom tup,
how lately blooms the rose!"
So instinct runs away.

That tireless fag went out,
the sea was spattered sun.
"Such goodness all about
and I am overrun."
So instinct skims away.

That hireling in arrear
sat down to ease his legs.
"I wear man’s tiring-gear,"
cries he,"and nothing begs."n
So instinct pours away.

That tired miser fished,
his livelong self as bait.
"I've caught before I wished
the flounder in heaven's strait."
So instinct scales away.

He turned, all flounder-faint,
in hope of human eyes.
"All beggar, all complaint,
all pierced I am," he cries:
all instinct skun away.
FOR COMFORT AND FOR SIZE

TEN years aborning I," the young man in me cries, —"my house is empty best." The old goat in me spat, "Go beard the graying rat." Between us thus we try for comfort and for size. —But who prepares the guest?

"Ten years too soon I'll die, and all those years are spies —they wrestle in my rest." "Instead of prayer cry Scat, and lecher in cold fat," said the old boar in the sty; "odd comfort and even size!" —But who prepares the guest?

"Ten years too late I'll dye sea-blue these changing eyes —truth is the thing expressed." "Dye dark, self-dark, and drat the glass you're looking at." Homeless, the sea-lights wisp by, willing the gloom we prize. —But who prepares the guest?

"Aye wing-and-wing I'll fly, night airs abaft me rise —and all ten years confessed." "Your sails," said he,"will slat, your gear tear tit for tat." All greeting, no reply he meant life was. He lies. —But who prepares the guest?
RATS, LICE, AND HISTORY

An Image of the United States Senate

*There is no precedence between a louse and a flea.* ~ Dr. Johnson

THAT man who keeps the diary
is there, his eyes like running mice;
Ambassador plenipotentiary,
his says, to bargain fleas for lice.

Who sent him? whom he bargains for?
or what he'd sound like if he spoke?
or look like if he closed that door?
all's doubtless written in his book.

But we don't know. We only know
he's here, his hand upon the knob
of the big door. The rest we grow
aware of, like an engine throb.

He's not a senator, that's sure;
none of the page boys even see him;
there's nothing about him to endure:
you don't want to delouse or flea him.

—Is it the odor of almonds creeps
down the aisles, between the rows,
heavier than air? than sleep?
that each man smells but never knows?

Or is it the belling sound of words,
*The vision of mankind that you see,*
that can be only overheard,
*is my vision's greatest enemy?*

That's why the senators can't keep still
but each one, conscious of his face,
unconscious of his driving will,
scurries and squeaks from desk to dais,

and he who has been recognised
(anyone can be, somebody must)
looks on all fours, and undersized
gnawing darkness like a crust.

That man who keeps the diary,
suppose he opened up that door,
would he be live, be you, be me?
be recognised upon the floor?

Or would the bitter almond rise,
the rising gorge of full ill ease,
and all the lice, as each one dies,
take precedence with all the fleas?

Most like that door's a solid wall
that cannot open save it fall.
Most like that diarist's the ghost
that speaks the actual we have lost.

BEFORE SENTENCE IS PASSED

I

I have this to say, if I can say it.
Things are undone, your Honour. We are the same.
You also, Gentlemen: bench, box, and bar—
the same with different vantages. This is mine.
—Here are my hands upon the rail, my voice
fretting your ears. The wood is sticky, my words
the tight quality of the air you breathe,
the air a cauling skin upon us. All this
that is dismay in you, in me disorder,
develops, envelops, this browning twilight air,
this room of screams and patience and rejoicing,
and hides without day the uncreated face.

(But look, Gentlemen, so good, so true:
These two fat bailiffs will catch me if I fall;
the Court keeps order, and you yourselves
observe decorum past your understanding.
Consider, the will you keep, in me
is voluntary, habit a conscious act.)

You will agree, and well within your time
that nothing I can say here is digression,
and if you do not think so now, Wait:
You have not felt the focus closing, firming
on your vantage, not quite heard safety stop.
You don’t know whether, right now, your watch has stopped.
The time will not be wasted if you look,
even if you look also at the big clock over your heads.
—My digressions are like that: inward occupations.

To be in a new place and tell the old story,
to fumble in the voice and say, "It is not so,
this rubbish of insurrection, treason, thought,
I stand here charged with," that would perjure me;
—oh, not in this Court nor in your Honour’s law!
My innocence, like my guilt, is radical,
and strikes a taproot down you cannot sever.
There is a face within me that coheres.
It is not easy to portray that face, 
to prefigure what is long past, to show 
the normal as a monster, to arrest God 
visibly in his invisible escape; 
to exhibit love as uncreated fear.

But what is hidden without looking may yet 
transpire without being noticed: You shall see 
as you saw, just now, your watches were not right.

II

Asserted righteousness is avowed guilt, 
Gentlemen: the mercy within your bowels 
attests it, and the cold in the whites of your eyes. 
Verdict-cold. This is an interdicted time. 
Conviction—yours as well as mine—and yours, 
your Honour, too, becomes the formal cry 
we order up to cover the blank moment 
saying, It is the Law. And if you ask—
and may it please your Honour, you should ask, 
(for goodness and truth look not askance but boredom), —
Who interdicted what? I answer so:

It is my people, all my race and time, 
the stuff I harbour, savage that I am, 
that gradually have lost in tension, lost, 
that is, the keeping sod on the hill farms, 
(for we are hills at heart, whence cometh help),
and with the loss found various perfidy 
of white hope and party-coloured withdrawals. 
We have the forced, exhausting, unreplenishing crop. 
No more. Ripeness is lost: which is tension itself.

Even the apple has lost its tartness, and 
the potato cooks flat with no taste of death: 
good chiefly for alcohol, intoxication. 
But I do not wish to exaggerate the thunderclap 
who did not feel the lightning strike. It is simple: 
Erosion of good and evil, that’s the phrase; 
no tension to hold them together, no tragic need,
only the raging and indifferent perfidies
of opinionated unconvicted men.
Thus we clutch for untenable positions.

Your Honour knows just what I mean, and you,
my Gentlemen, are no more puzzled than I.
I am as dizzy with plain facts as you are:
the federate battle of the frantic dead.
I too am distracted from this lower buzz.
Bats raid the fault, I know, and gnats fly.
It is the evening; and in the actual world
which has neither faith nor perfidy nor hope,
it is the hour when eyes and ears take count
of vestiges and intimations, and
the gyrations in which these are merged and grow.
It is the sound through the open windows, high up.
—I need not remind you that we do not live
much in the actual world;

and hence, Gentlemen,
the sensation of irreducible distress, never death.
Take care, take care, you do not fly out the window.
The bats do, gnats do not—they settle,
sludge next morning in the residue of oil
(if you remember one generation back),
their distress always unequal in distribution.
It makes little difference that what is irrelevant
to gnats may be the next actuality for us:
the mass in darkness, the falling, the wiping up:
the deceit of fire seen only as light
or the worse fraud of light put up as fire.
You choose the phrase; I am the prisoner who sees.

But let us avoid that perspective. (I see a fly
rummaging the discolored crease of that policeman's collar!)
This has become a very quiet place.
One feels a dislocation. One tries at last
to say only what the heart says, do only
what the buds do: flower by conviction:
the inward mastery of the outward act.

Is it a gulf, Gentlemen, this place
of falling off? Look, it is cloaca,
in either case the end-all and inter-regnum
where every issue joins and none cry out.

But all this is confusing, flies buzzing.
(Confusion: have you seen confusion when safety stops—
the miring of draft horses in the salt marsh
below the turnips?) One lets go only
what one has not held, the roughage of the mind.
One holds
only that which was already reserved,
the vestige brought out of turbulence, order
surviving only by digesting disorder:
the gravel in each mouthful that we eat.

Such fustian! unless imagination supervene
with items, like your faces looking at mine,
your minds employing the words I employ,
your situation seen as the under half of mine:
my situation the guilty reward of yours.

III

It is like houses burning, here in this room,
right now, or soon, with all these people, my people,
swaying as I sway, and each thinking slowly
of his own house, not far off, afire by instinct.
The flues are dirty or the wiring faulty.
We think of little things,—of drafts and fuses,
of faces in the cut-off windows,—as large:
the unfinished work, the unattended wife—
as large as that! That is our history:
a holocaust of inattention, just
put out. It is in this sense that I burn.
It is your inattention set the fire
—oh not your present glare, your aching look
beyond, behind, the look to get away
of minds made up, and lost, while unawares—
I mean your inattention to yourselves,
until you saw me looking at you with both
your eyes and mine.
I doubt not you saw red—the beginning
sin of safety, the lower rim of blindness:
not only not to look, which may be forgiven,
but to act without looking, which is perfidy:
the final ignominy of giving in.

So you have come here, Gentlemen. So I.
And so your Honour. And all these people came,
a crowd sprung out of the cobbles, because of us:
the ever-springing hope of new guilt.
By this time, I think there is not one of you
feels quite at home. The first strangeness gone,
the new not wholly come. Even my bailiffs
grow tired with waiting: their eyes begin to creep.
There is disorder, like heavy breathing in the next room,
like people making way when no one comes.
The rest is not silence, except for me.
You will see shortly, all of you will see:
It is my right: I stand here in your stead.
THE CELLAR GOES DOWN WITH A STEP

IF I ask for your confidence, citizens, think:
You can't give what you cannot retract; not this year;
nor go forward unless you are ready to sink.
You prefer, therefore, this: that we speak but small beer.

The indubitably minor intoxications are
my religion and yours, whether I swear or affirm
or just plainly depose in full voice at the bar:
The people in the cellar have cause for alarm.

If you ask What people? What cellar? — I blench
(in my own cellarage) and uphold—Education:
the new need that I see for schoolboys to learn French,
the frank language that ends mere conversation.

It's the natural thing, not at all disconcerting
nor suspicious, my friends. Our American flag
is not plainer than the mediate wave of mere blurring
if we speak only English and carry eggs in a bag.

Many thanks. You have heartened me, strengthened my cause,
you young men with straight eyes, older men with improved
looks;
your indifference marks the last reach of applause.
I can speak this once safely and speak by the Book:

In the cellars of cities, of factories, hotels
and courthouses, condemned houses, and planned towns,
on the first downward step, we begin to know well:
the other fellow never does the walking up and down.
THE IDEA OF CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

It is not the effort nor the failure tires.  
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.  
William Empson

THE acute old men may refuse to read Dante,  
yet like him they connive at the dead while alive,  
this peekaboo inside us; let it be  
for they also have sharp faces, play stud penny ante  
looking twice at each face card and holing each ace  
this hugger mugger rising; let it be.

The unquiet, the not knowing, the lessening sun,  
anæsthetic accord; Dante's face like a board;  
this peekaboo outside us; let it be  
the small boy in his bed; winter owl where rats run—  
Look! the bright mezzo-mark, the white swoops on the dark!  
the hugger mugger's in us; let it be.

But the old men keeping store have no time for ill reading;  
the boy's dying; the owl rising; new rats aprowl;  
this is the hurly burly; let it be  
and the time has neither gone nor quite come for good breeding:  
we admit being bored and void the quick word  
this is the hocus pocus; let it be.

Does the cold owl, the small boy, the grey rat in the run,  
O false Dantes, need most the uncomfortable ghost?  
—unless the peekaboo inside us; let it be.
THE DEAD RIDE FAST

NOBODY ever galloped on this road
without probable cause. Nobody wants
false wind in the face at a dead end.
Nobody wants, this day, his hair to grow.
No one would disagree about that, unless
to cover up deeper agreement, hide
the robber’s sense, the pounding, the vertigo,
the confusion under expert discernment:
all we leave out to make of faith a hope.

And if you think I am not talking about anything
it is because you have not looked out the window
where I wash and shave and sometimes trim my hair,
and have not seen the inviolable standstill
everything comes to, people, horses, cars,
beyond the little rise above the culvert.
It is that standstill finds all coming things
between the woods they come from and the rise
where, recognised, they seem already here.
With me it is no longer a matter of not looking
or whether this day everything comes at once;
because of that eddying standstill I am,
expectant, reverent, or suddenly degenerate,
always deliberately unprepared.

Perhaps you don’t catch what I mean. Look here.
There have been bats in this house, variously
crawling and flitting, not easy to get out,
but always bats whether you knew them or not;
there have been seabirds beat against the window,
bill on, some die, but mostly only stun;
ducks in the marsh, with their known unknowable voices;
also telegrams delivered at night;
all these are wholesome until you stiffen to meet them.

You understand: I will not make of politics
a superstition, of religion a distrust,
of thought a mania. I will not look under beds
with stiffened eyes, knowing what I shall see.
I will look at horses, people, cars, look up
from shaving, and the hurried dead, look up
through the light-sodden, reverberating air—

until that day, hopeful, thoroughly prepared, in my own glass I trim my snakey locks.
The Good European
1947
TWELVE SCARABS
FOR THE LIVING: 1942

I. Terror Treed

Where courage shaped at manhood left me freed,
now clearer freedom is, and sweeter air,
in actual rejoiced-in fear, in terror treed.
It is the final excellence of despair
unfetters, and reveals, the full deed.

II. The Skin of the Soul

If righteousness without its faith is sin
and faith without its sin is empty act,
how shall the armed man plead? or soul save skin?
Between the lover and his murder pact
there is the third lost face, self looking in.

III. Second Drawer

Inside the desk-life of this chartered ease
I keep—that lockless unopenable second drawer—
my great grand uncle Charles’s Civil War,
his cavalry pistols and his diaries.
The martyr batters at the wardrobe door.

IV. Theme for a Novel

Crossed loyalties that graze together,
new love betrayed, the old defiled,
make any an immoderate tether.
Nothing thrives here but runs wild.
My house lies open to the weather.

V. Heil!

Scream in your man's voice out
the last biling of your staff and rod.
Stand straight, click heels, up arm, and shout!
How should you know, through Christless span,
—O single-throated, singled man—
how all that foulness covets God.
VI. Declaration

The one burgling masked word
the burst sound of the self rent
is not mine nor my accord:
I come as one sent
from violate to violent.

VII. A Fresh Encounter

Again severalty falls
the vast like and dislike
the rich rage and love’s small change
in the same loins
the full and fell
awake for loving use.

VIII. Tush, said the Godless Man

How shall the pierced hope become a skill
or unassayable dread make a true die?
How keep an open or a candid eye
if the spider is more righteous than the fly?
My mouth makes chicken-fat of all my will.

IX. Wisp o’ the Will

For eighteen years this mouth has lied:
there is no man nor woman
I can lie down beside
and cry O God give me to hide.
Never could I have cried from pride;
nor can I in humiliation will the human.

X. To Enobarbus
(the Fish-hawk atop Prospect Harbor Beacon)

Thanks once again for dark, old screamer, and
give thanks yourself, old eagle-feeder, fisher-king:
The night, full-armed, all-wiving, young, descends,
descends, O barred Osprey, upon us both
to blot the sick valiance that cannot act.

XI. Phoenix as Foundling

Ah, foundling Phoenix, from the first wing rush
will ashes fall, of all that was renewed,
the ignominy, the growing good, the hush:
recovering through change the changeless mood.
This pyre, O Phoenix, lights new-foundling blood.

XII. Enantiodromia

Note well, you who have hearted hands,
that inching, loveless lust, one detail more,
will bring you where the Vision stands:
half unexorcisable ancestor
and half your newest self, turned grudging whore.
THREE POEMS FROM A TEXT:
ISAIAH LXI: 1-3

I
Beauty for Ashes

All day I trespassed on my friend's new death, and talked of it with strangers to give it handle, the skill of a firm pressure in the handshake, felt but not regarded. "My friend was killed!"
I had the voice but not the throat for gesture, the seething in me was beneath control. "Was killed in Italy on a high road."
I thought of dust, and rock, and hanging trees. "Never was God revealed upon that road, never was man saved in that high place!"

By night private, I balanced warring moods, white anarchs shifting in the moonlit room, and made of fragments—his lurking underword, straight eyes, high cheeks, and equable fresh glee—a sheave of presences to garner home, harvest and fecund ancestor of cold dawn. Also, I gathered unknown waste of him looming within, the smother lifting the wide sea. Anarch or ancestor, mood called mood.

I have been selfed just so before, and drained. By ill and various violence have died at eight an aunt, an uncle nine years later; a father and grandfather in great age; and five friends else in swart, unequal time. Theirs has been the chaos I abide, of them myself the faltering piety: my ear for echo, my hope for grace and gesture. I am in tide with them, their verge in me.

My friend died on no road. My friend was killed in the rude place that stirs and is the same, the bottom place that is beyond, the place of balance and loss, gulf in even eyes. He died protesting fellowship and self, the common hope, uttering himself alone.
In either ash is beauty, in all beauty ash.
Accepting all, all but the self yields up.
II
The Oil of Joy for Mourning

Him whom the old joy fell over,
night rain each night a new lover,
I sing, I see, I wake;
in last me, the unsleeping, the dark rover—
in him a raw joy for no sake.

2

As once by June dusk he played trover,
at full moon found fourth leaf in cut clover
among grass, dew-honey, and live toil,
so I flush new scent from hush-cover,
from the fit air we breathed, a sweet spoil.

3

Again as, through noon-dazzle, flash plover
beyond number, and are lost in fog-hover,
from his dying—the swept air and sea-slake—
I pluck, I lose, I discover
one flower, all flight, and joy-foil.
III
A Garment of Praise
for the Spirit of Heaviness

How may I see the triune man at once?—
Mowing witchgrass in the quarry road
while grasshoppers clacked before the scythe
one August noon, his easy straddling stride;
or later, swimming far out and on his back,
the half-smoked cabana making long ash
beside me on black granite. Such memories
are of the country of the blue, too far
for capture and too near to see at once.

There is no choice, severally is all
in life that has been stopped but never finished.
I see him then:
In the north shadow-pool of the opened door
greeting imperceptive friends with gravity and drinks,—
and surer friends with candor only less grave—
as sunlight is grave upon a windless bay,
the warm upon the cool, like rum in milk.
He saw people more in relation than as kin;
as next, and touching, than as continuing,
like grasses prostrate in the marshy stream.
Keen on the possible, the first to hand,
but prodding the impossible, he doubted
nothing of the murder in the heart
that might—so long the distance!—be blessing in the eyes:
knowing murder in the eyes was from sacked heart.
Obliged, therefore obliging; owning disorder within,
he observed a gentleman’s disregard without.
"Laurel at table, ivy would spread," he said,
"through after-talk, over the sere and sore."
He put the oldest inchoate shapes in words
that rushed, as animals rush before they spring,
to a sharp halt, cresting, then falling fell.
The quiet in his voice was drenched in strength
—always a kind of violence in gear.

A man of family, ancestors were like children:
subject to expectation, certain to disappoint,
always a part of the self—the unfinished part.
A man of state, his privilege to claim none.
An extravagant man, could not afford protection.
In talk he reached straight through what lay between
without quite reaching, so deep the pit he reached from—
so deep you could not tell what depth brimmed there.

Therefore as soldier he cast himself a rôle
that needed ancestors and children to play;
behind, ahead; dragon slaying dragon.
Folly is more acceptable if played
half by memory, half expectation
and violence loses unreality.
"Never was an army made less career of war,"
he wrote, and wrote again as I write now,
"so safe from mockery and fond applause."
Never a hopeful man, yet he was hope,
the necessary, upwelling swaddling cry
that man's might and towering skill, man's hand,
might end what fellowed them, in single blow,
then shudder only in the birth of dream.
Man has created that one cry as good;
this shudder of it what we grieve, and praise.
THIRTEEN SCARABS
FOR THE LIVING: 1945

I. Too Much for One: Not Enough
to Go Round

There are too many heart-shaped words for one
to seem enough or two to offer choice;
and yet the heart offers the mind a voice
above all words. Crying its All is None,
it is the heart itself that comes undone.

II. With the Bit in the Teeth

Hunger makes the simplest face: the blind;
makes up the soul that outlasts fear, the heart
all beat, and a dead hundredweight for mind.
Only its mouth can see, that shapely part:
all mouthing, all slow, lock-jaw grind.

III. Vengeance is Mine

How beautiful the kicked-in face you show
for surgery, self-heal, or burial cart,—
or manners if, by God, there be no heart.
All maggot’s else, and swarming vertigo,
mortification of the victor’s woe.

IV. The Socratic Method

"I cannot live," man's nearest ape cried out,
"unless my ugliness assert its good
like Socrates."—Who is in self so stout,
so plain and passionate in fortitude,
he can keep down the outrage of his own lout?

V. For an Air Fit to Breathe

After childhood there is no certain home;
boys cannot breathe the ordinary air,
and men must needs mistrust their own despair;
but as friends go, or die, or ail, there come
compassionate intimations everywhere.

VI. The Quality of Horizon Blue

Who’s sick? Who lies awake in sweat? —Oh, who, in new cut-off from speech to answer, prays the splitting of the self will stop? Not you; you see betimes the blackest black is blue; where Self recedes in selves, and Day in days.

VII. In the Wind’s Eye

Passionate are palms that clasp in double-fist; compassionate palms lie open to the sky; on either the dew falls in manna-mist. Weather is all. The sailor’s answering wrist hauls up, or down, as winds rise, or veer, or die.

VIII. On Common Ground

Shambles come ready-made these years, are found wherever man has stood, and lost, his ground. So the wide world. It is no otherwise within the narrow ward where each man lies apart, his own breathing a shamble-sound.

IX. Holed Up

Terror is not in the sweet night that falls, that covers with moon-snow all raw frontiers, that merges shadow-hands, that shadows tears. All that is life’s self-heal. True terror crawls within, where though bog closes, raw voice still calls.

X. Don’t Tread on Me
(For Those who Plead Humiliation)

All words are whips, but the butt-end of that word is lead with ending echo in your throat as well as mine; the echo we miser-hoard like strength until the viper is full bloat. Look how pit vipers knot them in accord.
XI. Super Hanc Petram

Such is the disrepair of love in man
this house has hingeless doors that still are locked,
has windows glazed with eyes that crave, and scan,
that vertigo in which the Rock is rocked.
When public life is all, then God is mocked.

XII. It Is Not Half So Late as You Think

Not Byron’s Greece nor Garibaldi’s Rome,
no Third Republic, no, not Lenin’s dream,
not Ireland in the pitch; not ever these,
for these are of the deadmost dead, dead pride:
all their hard triumphs our reopened sores.

XIII. The Light Left On

The light left on where no one is burns double yellow,
late light and lone: two wounds that never fail
and never heal. It burns beyond hope’s pale
what hope would make, what substance would avail;
makes room, makes house, makes home, with faith full fellow.
THE GOOD EUROPEAN:
1945

I
A DECENT CHRISTIAN BURIAL

«A robin redbreast in a rage
puts all heaven in a cage.»
—Blake (with rhymes reversed)

i.

For chocolate, for soap, for stone
at heart, men hunger and atone
in common supper. It was the war
packed wolves at every outside door.

Our Europe is their history,
their ups and downs. The man I see
makes grits of the whole Christian age,
eats of himself in splitting rage.

His hunger, which had been hope burning,
becomes the aimless, cold thing, turning.

Nausea is that beggar’s crust,
love comes unswallowed in distrust;
nausea and distrust but rile
even the eyes in a black bile.

It is the eyes of that man there
we must now seal, and weight, with prayer,
since neither death nor sleep can close
lids on those final vertigos.

ii.

Look: he is the man before
the after man, he is the door
either opening or shutting; he
is Eden live, and Ark asea.

Look: there is of you in him
the gone life, ache of lost limb;
he is the dreaded self you plumb:
all things that bide, and can not come.

iii. (secreto: for all the dead)

Yet who would want relief
from mankind’s final grief?
May be my sighing
is yourself dying,
Thus we add belief
beyond complying.
May be the mired adventure
binds us to rejoice
where death is homage due,
and living on, a censure.
May be the living I
is the next risk of you,
and your dead voice
my noblest lie.

iv.

Because the children mauled each other
I saw the Father beat the Mother,
the Family become the Ghost,
the faithless carry off the host.

How often has this Figure stood
exhausted in the quarry wood
breaking into stone on stone
and nothing mortared on its own:

the man intransigent: the Son
thinking himself the desert one.

Not ever yet has that man died
quite of his own will and pride,
not even at Augustine’s Rome
his hitherto most desert home.

Always the officious stranger slew
(likewise his office now we do)
in holy fear of burying
the living and renewable thing.

This time he does not need us save
for extra grace on extra grave:
he is self-slain, this new begin,
this self of us and utter sin.

Stand therefore now aside, and brood
in your own desert and be renewed.

v. (secreto: for all the living)

It is not the burned out houses,
not food nor transport loss, that rouses
massive resentment and self-rape
and pleads disorder as amazed escape.

It is the ragging in the mind
as thought goes doggo, kind on kind,
and all that had been common will
is spoil divided at the kill.

Concert and conflict disengaged
leaves even natural prayer outraged.
II
PHŒNIX AT LOSS

i.

There’s little phoenix-clay in us, these days; that little, more an ache than forward stress. Doubtless the impulse always came at ebb and turn, an under shudder at the slack, only accountable as further loss; so if tide rose, and not our tide, it rose but to obliterate, above the tide-mark, the biggest driftwood bonfire we could build to burn all up before all fire went out. Atlantis may have been burned, not swallowed up: like Troy, and Alexandria, and Rome; the Reichstag and the House of Commons, cities within cities, whose ashes still are hot. To say these things quite clearly and at once: We burn the last dry lifewood of the mind.

ii.

To say these things again for conscience’ sake: Suppose a cornfield by the sea afire, one crow, one scarecrow, and one farmer there, Mount Desert rising barren at the back. Suppose, that is, you are at home and lost. —Surely each Phoenix must have been old crow in his own glass, scarecrow to the faithful, so ancient his annunciation seemed, so cold at dark noon his residual fire; even his gorgeousness showed ragged black in the fiery rage and fire-begotten wind; seemed draggled beyond capacity to fly— while acrid, thick, the dragon-smoke of flesh half-suffocates that unexampled flame in which the self utters the self consumed. So fierce the necessary bellows are. —Old crow, old crow, why drabble in that fire? Can you and those crossed sticks burn as one ash unless the mountain fall and sea make maw? Old crow, old crow himself is scarecrow now:
the nothingness the scarecrow frightened off.

iii.

Old crow, old crow, surely there’s fire enough
to ash your present limit of desire.
Old crow, old crow, flop in that fire like mire
if you, or that one there, be phoenix-stuff.

Have you another measure for man’s scope
in which the final virtue is rubbed out
and even Phoenix to the lout seems lout?
True sacrifice is suicide by hope.
III
DINNER FOR ALL

«A good sinner makes mighty good eating.»
—heard in a dream

i.

Thought is the bomb for personnel: We think, and are a long time numb, like a thumbed bell stinging and numbing, think and muster up mostly incendiary reactions, think disaster, wreaked or suffered, shapes all choice. Explosion is contagion mind to mind, a jelly-fire that sears the senses out, and so compounds such felonies of faith that plots to foul or blight each other’s peace seem author to our peace. Thought is that bomb, and each the equal target. (Wherefore caws the Phoenix: Let me be!)

ii.

That bomb is thought, destroying thought preserved, as if we had not always, each of us, the crazy might to kill his dearest son brother or friend, all but the odd man left, yet seldom did, because the odd man smiled. How shall we bring the senses back to faith? how touch the various god in man? how trust the sudden drunkenness of intimation that keeps and teeters balance, razor-edged —the ecstasy beyond in present love? That bomb is thought, and each the equal target. (Wherefore crows the Phoenix: Let me be!)

iii.

Take thought more slowly, then—as tolling bells take echoes in of our dead selves, and wound with actuality the living ear. Take thought of harm in love, that fends off sleep (lest in the harm the love dream justice dead)
until their concert wells, like blood elate,
a sweetness going off, and all eyes close.
So hard thought's pattern is, and true. All things
are possible in their corruption, none
without. Love takes the risk the best is worst.
Thought is that bomb, and each the equal target.
—Wherefore pleads the Phoenix: Let me be!
IV

CODA:
RESPUBLICA CHRISTIANA

«The sea is what it always was.»
—T. S. Eliot

Here come the hole-and-corner men
straggling the night-routes once again
to loose—like rain one drenching sound—
interregnum from underground.

Eight hundred years of drifted silt
eddy above us, all our guilt.

(What weight of wind what whirling cloud
what rock what spring what birth in shroud)

These lovers in disorder must
fresh-soak the ignominious dust
that blows and blinds us in dry flood
till all fall on their knees in blood.

No order that can bind and loose
self-violence and mass-abuse,
no order that can loose and bind
the shambles under the human mind;

no order ripens into weather
unless it bind and loose together
chaos of good consuming ill,
of lovers who search and shun God’s will.

I in my corner-hole wait numb,
and stinging, hope all aching thumb.
This much I say in secret now:
God does not make, does keep, man’s vow.
SUNT LACRIMÆ RERUM
ET MENTEM MORTALIA TANGUNT

Across the huddled lamplight window glass
is black, ashine with that last, blacker mass,
the drifting shadow of arrested wings.
Here is the empty chair, and here, alas!
the awaited time, when time seems most to pass.

We are, in midmost ground, our own dead kings:

Because in dark are bred the tears of things
that frost the heart, cold dew on prostrate grass,
new psyche gathers gooseflesh in, and sings,
in its dark corners, its wild waste winnowings.
BOY AND MAN:
THE CRACKING GLASS

—"Look, look in your heart, believing boy, what is this life looming against the mind that now, half ignominy and half joy, even now, with men retrenching on their kind, can pull us upwards from the underground, your ground and mine, with such a cracking sound?"

—"Look in your vanity, O vivid man, not in my grating heart; it is your eyes, frosty with fallen dark and the great van of the moon’s light, which tell the noble lies that rend us and praise rending as God’s will. Look in your pride. Create the God you kill."

—"I cannot look into that glass and pray."
—"That cracking is my life your truth the way."
MICHING MALLECHO

Hopping, half-flying, pouncing, by foot and inch
the crow scuttled upon the rabbit, that small
ear-flattened, brown, zig-zagging anguished winch
of sound, until it could no longer crawl.

Out of the main deep, into the fold,
caucus, or warren, or rebellious soul;
no crow is eagle there, no rabbit rat.
What are these talons in me clutching at?

Loss talons loss, as hunger talons cold.
This inching flight and hunt cast up the mind
in nightmare fractions. The sum is salvage, the whole
last gadding claw of horror undefined.

Which monster is the human, which God’s scold?
You strike and stricken fall, in either rôle.
THE RAPE OF EUROPA

This age it is the same, with less remembered. The first was mounted by a foam-white bull; others that came after were less sure what beast bore God upon them fatally. Always Europa is a doubting mother, seeing the torn place struggle to be healed; while what is born lies shameless in her lap.

This age her whole loveliness lies mauled, battered and barren from a six years' bout, so trod and torn, grossness itself defiled. Though none could seem to mother her but earth man monstered God upon her nonetheless. The muck she lies in mocks the muck of birth, and what is born lies blameless in her lap.

Horror got out of horror may yet be blest when the great scar of birth begins to scab and with each change of weather pull and burn and the wound verge on flow. What bore, tore; the horror and the glory are the same. Man's hope the wound, God's memory the scar! —else what is born lies nameless in her lap.
ITHYPHALLICS

Surely we hear thunder
finding on this morning
all our substance wonder.

Wonder is self-guiding,
winds itself a wishwood
labyrinthine hiding.

Hiding is from ocean;
all around and under
its dividing motion;
all inside, its thunder.
THE COMMUNIQUÉS FROM YALTA

Not heart, not soul, and not their joined intent, not these alone, but the whole process, breaking; these are not salvo sounds, but fire raking all hope, all memory, all undertaking.

—Who mocks the mockers when mockery is spent? When will this dry tree I clutch be done shaking?

[Luke xxiii, 31]
Uncollected Poems

Publication information, including all publication dates, is supplied in the Apparatus Criticus.
Alma Venus

The old old men, since they have wit
To count no thing entirely done,
No race completely run,
Will pardon me that I should sit
Beating my days out in the sun;
That I should never lift a finger
Nor urge one thought ahead,
Except maybe to linger
Upon some image that might else have fled,
A wind-borne shaft of dust, to join the dead.
They'll pardon me that I should choose,
For all my laziness,
Out of the images
That contemplative men may use
To dramatize their reveries,
That of a noble woman in her ease.
No man's that old and anxious after death
But that old memories will flood
With new-born sweetness all his blood
If this grave woman cool him with her breath,
Or drop her hair on him, a perfumed hood.

The old old men will pardon me
That I have, breathing in my mind
And stretched like flesh upon my nerves,
The one life older than all history,
Older than any dust they find
Cluttering Egypt's infancy
Or Greece's full age, or Rome declined,
The oldest goddess that an old man serves.

Looking at her there where she lies
I see, for all the time she's run,
There's not that beauty in her eyes
A common woman might have earned
Out of such seasons in love's school;
Nor yet that look of cool
Extravagant indifference
A lesser spirit might have learned
When so much adulation had been won
And with so little violence.
I think (maybe because of the intense
Heat of the ancient sun)
That she has whirled too many an identical round
Of bitter spring and swollen June
Ever to be completely beautiful
Or perfect like those women snared in dreams.
Looking at her grave nakedness it seems
Her flesh has been long trodden, like that ground
Where the world’s playboy and the world’s fool,
Where Socrates and Hercules
Tramped smooth the narrow pound.
So if the old old men forgive me
I’ll say she is more powerful
And far more wise
Than any Socrates and Hercules.
I think maybe there stir
In her most muscular broad thighs
All men that ever were.
Last Things

Now what I want
Out of these days is one
Still hour time shall not taunt
Me with the beautiful things undone
Or bitterly incomplete;
I would meet
Between the midnight and the first succeeding bell
One hour brimful as the sea,
One body deep as breath in me:
So I would do my last things well.
A Funeral for a Few Sticks

I sit here, and this man sitting beside me,
Both thinking, thinking a form upon the world.
Here in this hillside place this ancient man,
Whom I in my own might have dreamed alive,
This man and I, and we alone, guarding
A fire, and he feeding the flames with sticks.
His weathered, earnest face, his earnest voice:
Stuff of my thought. Of these I made a god.
—But did my heart beat truly when I dreamed him?

It is no matter. I have walked with him
All day, and heard him speak, and penetrate
That seer sense which lurks beneath the skin.
I saw him stare, when he had finished talking,
Gravely across the bare brown hills, and felt
The everlasting quiet of the land
Drawn up into my veins, a numbing sap.
Then he and I were breathless images
Rooted eternally into that stillness.

I heard him speak, reduce his flesh to voice:
"If on a word I hang the sum of time,
If on a name I nail the sign of years—
All wisdom passes on my breath, and dies."
The voice snaps in the memory, a vain
Recoil. "Sweetness is only to the worm."

I made this man an oracle, to hear
The stroke of being, beat on the heart's gong;
Gave him the colour of a god, may be,
That he might make the godly seem more real,
That he might sheathe the shadow of our dream
With human flesh and human memory.
Being matured among the dead, he sprang
Among the living old, and glitters where
Old thought becomes a sense, the sense a voice.

II

"I snap a sapling, hew a tree,
And gather deadwood from the ground,
I bind my sticks with fire;
Hope they may be
In flame set free
The consummation of our giddy round:
The quenched brands of desire."

III

I have pulled up this man from darkness, singing
In the long aisles within my mind, singing
Upon the everlasting years, singing
Till my whole being grows giddy on the song.
(A song of timber cut and timber burned,
Of sticks which beat the earth before they burned.)
I have imagined him above the game
Of memory, beyond the treachery
Of fancy, real: a thought grown mountainous,
Gigantic, become a gesture and a man.
I made him so his eyes might meet the sun,
And in that blazing mirror lose his image,
Then stare us through with blue, sunbrightened eyes,—
Yet never cringe among our deadly shadows,
But rather greet each shadow separately
And call its name, and burn a stick for it.
I’d therefore have him choose out of his pack
One stick for me, and while he burned it up
Have him sing out those words which had been mine
From my own mouth had I had song to sing them.

IV

While love’s outrageous winds poured from the south
One April day, I heard my voice in him,
The indestructible passions of the dead
Confederated in my fleeting blood.
"Love drags my swollen shadow under sea
Where it is beaten on that rocky floor.
—Shapely and strong, if it have luck at all,
It swims upwards into the sunshot waves;—
Else dissipates, and dyes some rocky hollow
A little darker." —He paused; then in his voice
May be the fraillest song man ever heard.
"Sunlight sundust sundreams
  glittering on your hair,
only the wind and the wind's
  vain shadow move
  a flickering about you, now.

"What sunless centuries
  of gallant, half-maddened men,
their bleak, disheartened faces,
  throw shadows in my fancy, now,
go dancing through our blaze.

"Sunlight sundust sundreams,
your beauty is
  perfect, only when the wind
and the wind's vain shadows
  shriek once, and die.

"(Gallant no more but fierce
  hald-maddened ghosts should rise
weaving a net,
  their earthly vengeance, in the wind
and the wind's vain shadows, now.)

"Sunlight sundust sundreams
  sunshadow windwave a gale
so black so shrill
  O love
so black here a man so blind."

V

"I'd choose the vanquished man,"
I heard him cry one shining noon,
"Because his sullen eyes might scan
  Wide seas and never be deceived
Nor think a shadow of the moon
  Divinity to be believed.

"Second I'd pick the clown,"
He added from his hilltop place,
"Dizzy from dancing upside down;
Because his anxious paradox
Might half-ignore God's glittering face
And count all truth in ticking clocks.

"And in those two I'd find,"
I heard him swear beneath the sun,
"One double-edged avenging mind
To shake the stars in that great strife
Whereby eternity's undone;
Then I'd be master of my life."

VI

So I have heard this man, whom I dug up,
Out of the sluggish bottom of my mind,
Speak out for me when all that slough was dumb.
—All day he tends the fire, feeding it
With the dry sticks, the tokens. When the night falls
And the fire reddens, he rocks back and forth
Slowly, as if his body fanned the blaze.

—Upon one evening I had imagined him
Lonelier than a living man may be,
Chilled deeper still where in his heart the flames
Of memory blurred thick, a burning wall.
The forest rose upon our hill, the dead
A tide of shadow flowing through the trees.

"I see a man most like a tree
Raising wind-clotted eyes
From sunless earth to empty skies.
Thomas O Thomas speak to me.

"Pull down your hat and keep
The wild wind out of your old eyes,
Snuggle yourself in warm,
Nor heed the braggart storm,
And sleep.
But speak O Thomas speak to me,
Come slowly and speak to me once only
With your eyes.

"Bow if you must,
Thomas, and die,
Grapple damply with the dead
And stuff your mouth with sand.
But hear me, Thomas, where I stand
Overhead
Near the skies.
Bow if you must,
Thomas, and die.
But let it seem—
Between death’s vacant dream
And empty skies—
You speak to me.
Thomas O Thomas speak to me,
Come slowly, and speak to me once only
With your eyes."

VII

And so he sings my heart out all the day.
(All time the sticks are crackling, and the world
Is funneled in that flame, a burning vacuum.)
One day, when I felt tired and old, I climbed
His hill and met him face to face, and saw
Behind his sunburned eyes, my image glitter,
An antique face of water-polished stone,
And yet felt older than that face. —He shrank
Utterly in upon himself and sang.

"Though I’m a young man yet
As ages go
And still can count a day a day
Or twenty years a woman’s due,
I cannot set
Finger to toe
Or thumb to nose, and say
What centuries I’ve dreamed those gestures through.

"If not a thought but lifts
A thin eternity,
Time has no gifts
It has not once already had from me.

"There’s not a woman but
I in her eyes behold,
Beauty or slut,
All beautiful things saddened and made old.

"There's not a man I know
But the sun's centuries
Stiffen and grow
Upon his face, a dusty, sculptured frieze.

"Though I'm a young man yet
Time falls away
As sleep falls from my eyes, or is
Gone like that warmth the south had blown;
I cannot set
One thought or day,
One trivial memory, amiss;
All day I sit here sinking into stone."

VIII

Again dark pours; flesh on the bestial floor.
—And if I chuckle sitting on this ledge?
(The seeds of laughter burst in stony fruit.)
I sit here and my god beside me drinking.
"Drinking drinking drinking
Sups sips quaffs twelve bottles a case."
What have I said? —Bring up your god on whiskey,
And feed the flames on whiskey. Say that's justice,
And say that ends it. Chuckle once again.
And the flesh reels and shakes with voice. You lose
Order, and time is vanquished; lose all faith,
Die out, depart this world. Still in the head
Within the glutted brain, a film or mirror
Holding the world most steadfast. Say that's justice.
—I sit here, sit here. Shall I muse?—collect
Records of infamy?—maybe display
The ruck of gravestones I have left behind me
Upon the thin curtain of memory
In lifeless view?—myself my audience
Hearing in my unprofitable laughter
My spoken epitaph?—a dullard's ending.
I sit here. —But in the court of bones what mercy,
The judgments of a dusty wit. "O you
Who sit there prisoner at the bar, you
Who squirm the stuffy scarf of memory,
Beware all human gifts. By this discharged.
The Court in consideration of your offence
Awards the palm to youth;—that twenty years
Spread out through ninety husky æons."
(You could have floored me with a beery breath.)
O dusty Judge O Wisdom of this Court
The worms are slavering within your robes,
And by this sentence O mine enemy
I gain a name, The Worm Among The Courts.
... But some one grinned. An aggravated case,
Her aggravating legs. (The Worm swelled up
To go to Court.) Besides, the grass was deep:
"The Court in ... thirty days, one hundred dollars ..."
And is my father in this bar room? Look
Under your feet. O father kiss my feet
And close those marble eyes and wipe that face
Battered from a thousand buck-and-wings.
John Doe and Richard Roe, the bench of bones:
O Dicky Dicky darling hold your tongue.
The musty mockery of broken bottles.
—Get off those swinging doors.

I said I'd chuckle. So much for epigraph.
I sit here with my god, a case between us;
A garrulous antique choirboy of a god.
See no pale nymphs to-day; nor homely wives
Spreading acceptable bodies in the dark;
No dogface demon women snare my legs:—
I snatch the pure mirror of shadow, enter
Among invisible reflections, emerge
And see my selfsame face stare back at me.
—How shall I profit here, when this my god
Wipes out even the dream?
How shall I prosper when my god brings up
A bulging drunken monster of ourselves
And sets him murderously before my face?
"May be he comes, this man, an answerer
To all your hope. See where he lurches past
Shaking the foul red staff before him. Hear
From the raw lips the words that bubble up
And spatter on the air so that the air
Crackles and smarts on the tautened eardrums.
What issue thence in sign or warning? —This:
In him words lose all lien upon the mind
And gloy the flesh like lice. —This image swells:
Some wench puffed up with a hundred measures of
Such slime as his staff spurs, took you to bed
And stewed you in her sweat until you rotted
Inwardly. So he mumbles from a mouth
Stuffed with such memory. Look you, his face
A metamorphosis of yours and mine,
Another mirror to our stricken souls.

"What worm of truth crawled in
That flexible red limb,
The brain's most monstrous twin,
When our black hearts imagined him
Dissolving all flesh within
The corrupt vim
Of his red, meat-raw skin.

"See where he lurches by, yet never passes!"
—Silent he bent to tend the dying fire.

How shall I prosper? Shall I slay my god?—
Blot him from being with a ruined smile?
What does he burn but rubbish, what incant
But rituals of terror, vanity,
And wasted years?
Eternal tokens.
And yet he is my own eternal voice,
The order of the chaos which I am.

Towards morning once I heard him speak most slowly,
Whose body seemed the last thing on the earth.
"Put flesh, all human flesh, away, for flesh
But binds the fever on the bone and sheathes
The naked thought in a live winding-sheet.
Put blood, all human blood, away, for blood
Is but the sweat that your heart’s agony
Drains from the bitter virtue of the bone.
And with the flesh put sorrow, with the blood,
Desire, away. Treasure the sweetened bone.
Nothing but wind speaks in your gaping vents.
—Do this, for you are old, and memory
Bloats you, obesity on ancient bone,
Sorrow the bland accomplice of desire.
Do this, for you are old. But hope that some
Miraculous bright day your bones ascend
A glittering shaft of dust into the sun."
—So in his voice my body thinned away.

IX

"Oh wild men took this timber
And chopped it in those lengths
Where it best could burn;
A wild heart might earn
In issue of such strength
Muscles made limber.

"A tree may live too long
And wither innerly
Though it seem strong;
Or thusly speak the wise,
And dying gods I see
With my own eyes.

"Oh wild men took the wood
They lived in, cut it down,
All of it was withered;
While their hearts were slithered,
They watched it crack, turn brown,
Burn as it should.

"No wonder wild men gave
A whoop and holler, bade
The whole world take fire
In avenging pyre,
And danced as men gone mad
Upon a grave."

X

Here now at last where I have sat so long
Waiting a certain end, I see him stand,
His speech drained out, a silent man, and bend
All power in him to the hushing flame,
Nor heed the prayers that gave his strength to him,
Himself the image of the thought that prayed.
(Fire and the ashy judgment after fire.
My burning sticks. My burning pride. Myself.)
I see him, sunlight a fountain on his hair,
A fiery heat shaking about his face,
His hands feeding a bundle of dry sticks
Slowly into the coals.

Spring when I loved.
Winter I fought the winds, down in the marshes.
And starved alone ten years. Then that hard year
I sat between the feet of stony gods
And parched my throat with their eternal dust.
Swelled up another year. And so; and so.
What have I lost?
Flame to the heart, and lightning to the sky,
Cold suns in sky-pits, dead suns in craters;
Fragments of flame, pale rubble of ash.

(See now the white wood gleam like a girl's flesh
And, when it burns, the beads of sap turn brown.)

A few sticks for a god to burn, the god
A monument, deathless upon those ashes.
Effigy

I

I saw a boy, once, put a thinking hand
across eternity (the pasture bars)
slowly, and touch, almost, the horse's nose;
and the horse baulk, then nuzzle patiently.
So I would enter a friend's house, So I,
each in its time, would enter love, would die.

II

The man looked up as the sun went down and I said
   Brother
   behold the passing of our context, the wind
shrinks from the felicity of night, the small
white flowers between the pebbles are less white;
the odour of pennyroyal, where your fingers
frittered and bruised the fresh leaves, is less
pungent. Behold we are absent from our love, we are
lost to the common undertaking of our lives; there are
unleashed within us the small animals of silence
and these keep watch between us. — Neither my brother
nor I nor the brown air which protected us
could ever give heed one to the other.

III

I looked at him who had that day been with me
digging for death, and so was set apart
so long his eyes took on that tarnished look
that all eyes too much looked in wear, and thought:
that tarnish must be what he sees in me;
else we are mirrors . . . Afterwards I said,
This is a silence we have dug here, not
a death. Silence is the more interminable.

IV

Three years ago that man whom I
Imagined imperturbable,
The dream of courtesy,
Blew up most suddenly
That he with a great splurge of blood might die
And find one sleep insensible.

The man grew cruel in his mind
And sacked the fastness of his soul,
That out of violence
Death's hushing excellence
Might fall and leave him cold and disciplined
Beyond debate, above control.

Three years in death. Now I have learned
What mockery our love appeared
When all our thoughtless care
Took an imagined share
In that untroubled mask of life he spurned
And sometimes in his wisdom feared.

Should I make him an effigy
I'd choose a windy hillside place
And see his figure stand,
Giant upon the land,
A man most anxious for eternity
Lifting an awkward, naked face.
Water-Ruined

Take, from these waters, Lord, their slowing,
Ah, take away, for me, their growing
Into a silence, their sheathing me.
In such stillness I can hardly be
More than a memory flowing
(Water-ruined) interminably.
Flower and Weed

Lacking another thought
Take rosemary I said
of the salt marsh kind
to bring those shortly dead
back from the damp lot
and cramp them in your mind:
and take the fireweed then I cried
that flames where a house once burned
for all those thoughts that never earned
by dignity of sense a peaceful death
and so have never died —
let them discomfort you and slack your breath.

This flower and this weed
shall sum us till we’re dead indeed.
Of a Muchness

Sweet the cold sea-moss, the old
tide-sounds and sea-change, the folding
of the waters on the earth — sweet
the sea pools and enchanted

to the salt verge of youth
the breaking of life upon the shore

and here the tree
that other sweetness
— look where the two thieves
their bright harsh eyes embrace
with all the slow variety
of Noah’s Ark
male and female, each in kind.
Sweet are we
hanging taut on the like tree
of the great dark

— what mercy of this world
what roman spear
could sweeten so
the new year
A Monument Among
the Winds

Here under the street-light, to think,
while my shadow shakes with the wind-shaken light:
blood must be bitter to give
heat to a soul in this cold.
— But see these others, the bent forms
struggling, driven on, seeking
a quiet end — or any end at all: these faces,
quiet in the great shrouds
of memory falling over them.

(See now
the lean dark ships riding at loss
before white headlands: the beautiful
grey fog alive in the rigging.)

Such beauty is a little stiff with the cold winds
of knowledge: beneath these frozen faces
the rigid forms — their naked fates.

To stand under the light with such
patience, of a winter evening,
as freezes the feet and ears; to think
the world’s knowledge sharpens these winds.

The vague, haughty faces
in the glassy waves of memory.
I am tossed among them, these others’ lives.

To see and to be seen, a prayer;
to be tossed upon the shameless winds so I
be loved and hated well by strangers.
To know and to be known; in the heart of winds
blood must be bitter with knowledge to give
heat to a soul. — Thus I am seen;
eyes go hard against me lest they
go blind: in such scrutiny as I suffer
the world cringes among the whirlwinds.

(Look into thy heart, thou cringing boy,
in the dark whirlwind the taut
figures racing, a little bloodied.)

These others’ lives.
Here under this light I reach out to clutch
for a moment the uncertain ends of life, I reach
for the fleet-furred owls I dreamed
had screeched above me.
I see my shadow tottering before me.

(Here is one man with the great pride
of peace slumbering in forgetful eyes,
and the winds drifting apart around him.
I cannot even remember him so gentle he was.)

I reach
for the rare, warm currents I dreamed
among these steady blasts, and am
plunged in a blind battle: behind
each racing figure runs
a pack of yelping ghosts, the heart’s
shadows, savage in the northern gales.

(To learn new violence and new voids,
the deadly powers of communion:
so much to learn another’s soul.)

Here under the street-light in the cold tumult
old memory thickens and breath
is difficult.
(And the world rides in a whirlwind.)
What better effigy can I have
than this my shadow,
time-eaten, tottering, a monument
falling among the winds?
Ides of March to April Fool's

Although the rain had fallen many days
and the sun beat between times, snow still clung
stubborn along the northern slopes. I thought:
Here shall a man sit down and fortify
against the summer the weakness of his heart.
There was old ice upon the pond below
and older ice within me when I looked
The grass was dead. The birds were travelers.
In springtime all things come before their time.

The man I thought of argued in the rain,
soliloquised in sunlight, dreamt in wind,
and inconsolable went home by twilight.
What if the whiskers thickened on his chin—
surely it was no more to say than this:
hibernal interludes were not for him
but winter-words, the stubble of the snow
(and thereby thus for me who thought of him).
No crocuses burst out among his hair.

He watched the razor bare the stringent skin
and then the small shorn hair run down the drain.

All winter long I stand here so, and grow.
I should have been winter-dead; at rest;
as numb, as dreamless, as the bears and bees,
quiescent, lost, at least, in earthy sleep, —
quickened with no unnecessary breath
and altogether hidden n the cold.
But no. I have been winter-stoked. I have
with vain-burning embraced the ice and snow.

Because I have had no quiet from the clock
nor any hour blotted completely out,
in springtime I am come before my time.

II

The rain turned warmer with the days and thinned—
shower to drizzle, mist to simple air.
That is the equinox, a thinning rain.
The man I thought of thought and spared no thought lest sparing one he shold have lost all thought and faced himself, without a thought, at loss before the catechumen which is spring. He queried breath, and sneezed, and breathed again (this was his catechism one long day) that breathing he breathed rain into his lungs and doubted somehow that he breathed at all: queried, there is no faith in simple things.

He paused, and humus dampened on his hands, the itch of growing and insensitive things fastened upon his fascinated palms like the red needles of the ivy itch. These are intercalary days, he said, put in between the dead and living, bruised and forfeited, to keep the calendar. The second hand upon his watch was small and itched relentlessly, but not, he thought, more than the ultimate relenting hour; — My watch is visible vicar to my heart, measures its waiting as if waiting ended.

No wonder he went out. No wonder, too, when he came home, he itched the more. The dead were getting out of hand, the living lost. Easter took wing, last year's forsythia neared bloom, and sudden cats rode male the female tattering agony at midnight with their discovery. Lapis revolutus est, moved from the dead, set on the living chest. In short, he heard that so and so announced themselves engaged and meant to propagate. So flesh was turned to water turning flesh.

He questioned that. His honest eyes grew sore. Escape or balm or waste, there was the low last luxury of self-pollution—in flesh sensual, or ascetic in the mind:— escape the cap of emptiness, balm in easy loss, in incompletion waste. He took these thoughts and turned to water, turned to the warm porcelain of a sleepy tub;
the body was a poor thing in a tub,
afterwards—toweled, rubbed, and crisp in cloth—it seemed the poverty was left behind.

He thought: the pond will have no ice in it;
and went to see. Already there were flies riffing and netting its windless end. He wept, not in his eyes nor salt, but in his heart and saltless gall, that neither he could keep himself a statue, silent upon his years, nor share the aimless miracle that brought these faultless flies, without the flair of fate, so briefly to their fate, then them replaced.

In me, he cried, nothing can be replaced.

East wind, he swore seawind, winged on the water, bright fish leapt not to flies that were not there,—but he flowed down in tidal heart to sea that was not, maybe, but his hidden heart. Great grey acres of glass beset him, stole out of his heart its magic, when he turned, imaged the whelm and roll of open sea. These are greenhouses twice and thrice he said, greenhouses, prisons to green growing things, greenhouses, housing a fictive, steaming spring.

He thought, this simulacrum thought and prayed: the sea herself is honest past belief; I will go down and be undone by her, undone beyond belief and passing faith. But he was wrong. That day the sea was large, swollen into a gale; too large for him and his small thoughts. A smaller self turned back, aching and twisting, a thought about to burst, turned back for warmth and seed and earth—for all the greenhouse life that lived in him—and did adultery with summer in his heart.
Night Piece

After a day of burrowing
among the living world's damp loam
some frail, sweetest imagined thing,
some memory has brought him home.

You will have seen him sit there reading
of Stephen Dedælus and Bloom,
his nerves excited, faintly bleeding,
as the words' ghosts ascend the gloom.

— Consider how the world goes blind
when finally he shuts his book
and gives the woman in his mind
one devastating final look.

Love of the body twists the heart,
the body swells with the soul's smart;
love is at first a summer ache,
but next the members burn with plague.

The web of kisses on the flesh
becomes in time a heavy mesh
that checkers the muscles of the soul
as those hard muscles stretch and roll.

— Hung on the blanket of the air
from firmest chin to faintest hair —
a lifetime in her face he stared,
lost all the moments they had shared.
Less Love Than Eachness

Less love
than eachness clinging to the sill of sense,
less unity than choice:
tight finger to finger
eye to grave eye,
this perpetual greeting
the tide-rip at the meeting
of the tide and stream.

And so I asked little at first
of the beauty I had chosen;
prayers are not granted
them that ask but them that thirst
though all the estuary of the mind
flow up with hot salt springs
and blind.

Now in the dark of time
so much grows in me through the ground
is drinking me and drunken,
given and being given shrunken,
I cannot render
the final spasm of surrender,
but with the world go round and round,
eternal tide-rip of our greeting,
lubricious slime.
Resurrection

I did not see the frigate Constitution,
her yards cock-billed and bare as if she still
lay unretrieved and rotting at her pier,
towed all the summer port to port,
a lubber's sport
to every ignorant patrioteer.

She should have had the same sea-burial
my great-grandfathers had that fought on her;
the inconsolable sea closing above her
with no sound but the scream of skittering gulls
and the wind dying where her sails had been.

Instead there are a thousand in her shrouds
swarming to set the sails that are not there.
The Bull

There is a shaking of the chain
as the black mountain turns
rippling with fury and seed-pain
and all that muscle all that weight
rises and visibly burns
until he mount and meet
the anguish and faith of the heifer's heat
and she from precipitous lightning learns
her virgin fate.

As the head strains with dull, lost eye
and half-choking there escapes
the thick rale, the throttled sigh,
the sudden thunder claps
announcing the hot spirit gone home
and the stilled spasm in the womb.

Then if the great neck sag
a slaked moment and he paw the raw ground
there is Europa shrieking in my loins,
her weakness and her terror bound
by the torment the craving the greed
for the hot thunder-seed
already troubling the limp bag
under his groin.
By Definition

Prudence is enervate hope
and hope one instinct or another soiled
with use, the smudge of bad art,
drudge of a broken heart:
does all the work when the will is spoiled.
I mean, by will, that consciousness of clean intent,
that tendency to move and know,
to realise in word and image obdurate things
to which the soul must needs consent:
thus wilful imagination willed the angel's wings.
That harridan who scrubs the floors—
do you wonder that she shreiks and means to kill?
She had a bad start; they taught her all the hopes
that keep her going beat with angels' wings.
As those who hear the midnight death-tick know,
nothing maddens like a yearned-for noise.
You, Prudence, are more literate and better dressed.
You think your heart is whole or else absorbed
by saving contract. Your art is more confused
than bad, more weak than mad, and hence you're bored.—
It is your clothes that hamper. I love you best
when wilful imagination wills you naked.
Consider, the gods whose will you nearly do
are merely mankind imaged in the nude.
The writing hand, by will, is naked too.
On Excited Knees

My hands have clutched through woodmoss damp leaf-mould, have curled to breaking on a splitting oar, but neither got my hands with child; they fold symbol and image in imperfect score. But ever, still (I on excited knees), the harrowed land awaits the greening rain, new-found Atlantis looms through easing seas, before my haunted hands unfold again.

It is imagination goes to seed in me, dies as it must, like God or corn, to prove the moment of its greatest need lies in the death that after we most mourn.

Why should I speak if all I value most bears the unreal terror, a spoken ghost?
All’s the Foul Fiend’s

Now in the fond unhappiness of sleep,
Again in that fonder dark, the waiting chair,
Time upon time, there mounts through my own deep
Honey of agony to tongueless prayer.

Both forearms ache, then lift and circling woo
(A yearn of fondest flesh) towards vivid stone
Waist to close knees. I am Pygmalion, I too,
And uncreate with what I would atone.

O viewless face, unseen O rose and wine,
O torso spoiled, plunder of damaged will,
All fades in my embrace: the sweet too fine
For flesh turns stone: the wraith of unused skill.

—These, alas these limbs I woo, infatuate
And constant, till the fiend fouls me and I create.
Nigger Jim

(for STC and Huck Finn)

Coleridge found midnight creative frost, inaccessible the keepsake of what is lost.

His the private century of laudanum, the dark angel rubbing the heart-skin like a drum with palm-heel stroke and finger-tip tap; and the darker angel with hands like a waiting lap.

So midnight holds. At dawn frost makes, and breaks. Huck Finn found pinnacles splintering, apex mentis at raking dark, synderesis scintilla, treasure of spark, found conscience bigger than the self: when frost slakes all that had been kept for wintering.

Midnight holds. Dawn breaks. Nigger Jim is skun; now all that bog of indolence asteam in sun.
And no Amends

Because you, like another, have demanded
  flesh in the ghost, hope in the host;
although you, like one otherm are beach-stranded,
  and anhungered and lost,
in unappeaseable need,
  oh, die not in this place
of most you I have made.

  There are no idols here, no hope delayed,
only longing and grace.
  Even these are uncopeable friends,
they devour their old selves:
      self-defeating and self-repeating,
the self toasting self, in longing, in grace:
  and no amends.

Oh, die not in this place.
  Here diminishes only,
with unspeakable longing,
  unbeseechable grace.
Mr. Virtue and the Three Bears

*We hammer out tunes to make bears dance when we long to move the stars.* Flaubert

*This morning at his Gas Stand in Lucerne on Route 1, Mr. Virtue was found devoured by his bear. Mr. Virtue left no known relatives.*

( Remembered some fifteen years from the Bangor Daily News.)

I knew a bear once ate a man named Virtue
All but a mire of clothes, an unlicked bear
Caught, a May cub, to dance for soda pop;
Who when half-grown lumbered before us slowly,
Gurgling and belching in the gas-stand yard,
On a sorry chain, and made rough music there.

A chattel property of Mr. Virtue,
Untaxable and nameless, this black bear,
For some a joke to sell flat soda pop,
For some terror in chains, wove himself slowly
Through founedered postures, till hunger smallled his yard,
And he broke free by eating Virtue there.

If no kin came to claim the clothes of Virtue,
Yet hundreds claimed themselves in that black bear
And drank the upset crate of soda pop,
Like a bear’s pavanne, swept the gravel yard
And made of vertigo a music there.

So fell the single hymn to Mr. Virtue:
In rough music that burst from that young bear
When sudden soda in his loins went pop,
All longing and no hope, and he danced slowly,
Rearing and dropping in his chain-swept yard,
Till Mr. Virtue dumped spoiled blueberries there.

—And yet, there move two musics wooing Virtue:
Those of the Great and of the Lesser Bear,
Of the star falling and of new soda pop;
And these two bears dance best when long time slowly,
Overheard, the Dipper spills by inch and yard
The northern lights on us from darkness there.

So praises blew in this bear feast on Virtue.
The greater sprang within the lesser bear
In music wild in the spilled light, to pop,
And by created hunger move, most slowly,
The blacker stars, fast set in their hard yard,
To loose their everlasting shivers there.

Let us in virtue so beseech the bear,
With soda pop, that he may dancing slowly
Move in our yard constellations darkly there.
Threnos

Among the grave, the gross, the green everlasting images are seen:
the grace of God, old girls, and March grass.
How hoarse in counterpart this threne,
an alleluia also alas.
From Letters to George

These poems were sent with letters to RPB's closest friend, George Anthony Palmer, from approximately 1921 to 1935. Houghton Library accession numbers are included in the upper left corners of the first page of each item. Dates, when RPB recorded them, are provided below the poem in the exactly format in which RPB provided them on the manuscript, or in an identical notebook draft. Additional notes on certain poems, and explanations for omissions, may be found in the Apparatus Criticus.
POEM

Against the arch of hands
the streak of her crushed lips

the dream
    (shores of her far land;
    legend, of swans
    the loveliness and love
    —Leda outwearing years
    tempestuously in bronze)

against the high citadel
of her, inviolable
POEM

Awakening dangerously
the enormous stride of song
the waters rose
   (the pyramids
glimmering of glass
   unevenly)
as blades of lucent amber
imposed on shining space
of ebony
deepening through plangent gloom

The ferries pass
each other, and my mind leans
to their meeting place.
BALZAC: SCULPTURE

It is that he by all ferocity
of silence and the white
form which is terror
of sense and lust;

it is that he,
in neck and head
which lean with hurt,
who strains for sound
of breaking strangeness
—tumultuously the life
which wreaks revenge on dust.

It is that he
who scarcely hears.

31 March 1923
b MS Am 1880 (4)

I

A coagulated spatter of blood on her mouth
And her face encrusted with dirt:
Dust with tears; petrified,
Uncogent—not now a pristine spurt
Of the earth. She lay, too much hurt . . .
Dead, a newly dead, whore,
Rigid her many scarred breasts,
Her belly proud, somewhat sore,
Pressed by several hundred chests
Of perverse boys seeking dark nests,
And biting, savagely, the core:
The last killed, but not before
Sucking the orifice of spore,
Constructing by invention crests
Of lust:—to drink a knifed palate,
Then, inquisitive dog, smell it.
The whore, the dead whore, rests.

Feb 24, 1922
II
The peal breaks, in the theatre
Before a violent stage,
From writhed lips, the laughter
At the tragic actor’s rage,
Of an empty eyed audience:
Applause, vapidty intense . . .
The inward screech of joy
Surges, bursts the surface:
The comic spirit of the race
Shrieks, serves to cloy
The exterior inanity,
The grimace of urbanity
Apparent in the civilised
Community; realised,
The bitterness behind the veil,
The deep, sharp-burnt core,
Laughter and a botched wail,
And the lips bitten, sore.

Feb 28, 1922
III
A tilted cap of cloth
Amid the crowd of human,
Not too human, froth,
Superimposed on a man.

A spurt, a lock of hair
Of poorly pigmented yellow;
The eyes a sullen flare,
Strong, unsteady, slow.

A startled, open mouth;
The gaunt arms swinging,
A flail for the female drouth;
His huge shoes creak, sing.

A swift intense stide,
A grimace at the fetish:
Haste, waste—folly implied—
He hurries, beating back flesh.

Fulfilling a fated share,
Obeying a higher mandate,
He hurries; no matter where—
The velocity is great.

Mar. 1, 1922
IV
If there had gone contempt
The full, bitter smile,
Of anger, the violent attempt
To pacify the beast while
Retaining the "higher nature"
Of man the superb creature—
Had these things been so
Blood would have been bearable
From his father's blow;
But it had seemed terrible—
Hard, given of delight—
Struck nine years before,
Still the gnashed tears were bright,
And the flame fierce in the core.
He said, "My father's affection
Needed sharp . . . correction."

Mar 4, 1922
DANAID

The winter drifts about you
and clots your brain
with spring.

(The thin heart of the winter
settles down in a flurry
of blotting snow
—the thought in your heart,
the thin voice of the dread cold,
waf-er-thin, the winter's life.)

All your limbs are straight and agleam with the cold.

You hear
the overwhelming laughter
of the buried earth.
b MS Am 1880 (6)

POEM

Delicately it is like
the little words
  cluttering
one within another
—cobwebs in familiar corners;

it is the tiny spray
of half evaporated
colour, the brittle
orange overcoming red:

it is by these
images I remember
dead and departed people.
A Dream.
So sadly I lie on my pillow of mould
Dreaming of the days, purple and gold,
When I was a child, very wicked and wild.
A memorial time, I smiled.
"Awake," a voice cried. And I woke on my side
Burning with the pain biting and keen,
That comes to a man when he's worn, when he's lean,
Hungered with fear horrid and cold,
That a corpse he was made before he had died.
Shivering in sweat like ice, I strove
To break and to burst my fetters of old,
Putrefying wood rotten with holes
That maggots have bored on my body to rove,
Adding one more to their host of souls.
My struggle is ceased; like a bird floating low,
Wafted by a breeze gentle and slow,
I sail ever upwards reviewing the show
Of the battle for life by the men below.

Written about March 1921
**Education**
They asked me what I knew;  
I replied:—I felt that tombs were blue and cold  
But that the sea was blue and ever changing  
To a delicious purple wrath.  
My truth  
Was the reverse side of their coin.

Bulls  
Of unsophisticated pomposity—  

Was all the world  
A sort of diseasedly intrusive god?  

"All" is scarifying laughter  
To be drunken in the dark.  

The manacles of their thought  
Enchained me,  
Depolluted my mind with . . . light?  

To live must one be ugly?  

One must ravish one's own soul.

*Jan. 1, 1922*
EQUINOX

You who run and space the miles
and shed the wrestling memory
of echo
(scattering such grace
— the winter’s hoard of wind,
and the high wind, the din
of the deepening day)
Play,
and strike with crackling gaiety
the crisp silence of the season’s death.

Harry the brown wastes, and explore
the shadowy dust of the dead months
whose voice is ever frozen trouble to our ears.

—I watch our weariness shake in lithe and giant life.
The Eternal prayer
So sadly I dwell all alone—
Shall I die of disgust at all things?
Slow as a moan
Of deep sorrow and woe without wings:
Time dwindles its depth by flight.
A world metallic and bright
Sans joie, espérance—shall I die,
Softly as an unheard sigh?
   Or shall I rebuild me my palace of dreams
   Where all that is lovely continually streams?

II
Have you heard the shudder of the wind
The timid wind wishing it were water
Motionless as dust
Scorched beneath a new born sun?
So I feel when the thrust of my lips
Is repulsed for my pennylessness.

Jan 1, 1922
EXACERBATIONS

The impact thuds: Words, the swords,
    Dead gods not wholly decayed.
The concise image subtends precise perfection,
    In this instance not Not in favour of the populous gush;
But with the partially unevident intention of chaos,
    Chaos refuge for dust,
A far cry from hell, thrusting sharp in the heart:—
    Assymetrical sequence of bugbears,—
Christ—explosive oath occluded by prostitutes;
Buddha and so forth religious corpses,
    Cat calls of insecure damnation.
The woodchuck's trapped shriek is essentially finer
    Not in the Text books;
The feel of a girl's garter is also better form,
Resilient; decorative red designs on the flesh
    Gnawed with delicate teeth
Or a crisp nipple severed in a kiss.
    More tasty.
    Not buttocks, or jock strap—
    Even Jehovah.
We may not smoke pipes in heaven from awe
    From awe
On beholding the sanctified crush of penitent prostitutes
    O Hell rise in my belly
It is, however, true that cheap loves perish;
For an exalted phallus dies soft,
    Slime gushes from the roots
And the stench must be whipped away;
Whipped, not wiped;
    Meticulously.

On the other hand Goya y Lucientes—
    Mafa, both ways:
She knew all the tricks.
    Hardly a girl.
(It is truly not my fault, Mafa,
You repose in Academia de San Fernando
Or that I have never come to take you away.)
Ecclesiastes here repeats his favorite formula;
And Turgenev: Strenuous truth,
The heart of another is a dark forest.
By no means flatulence
Though of obscene implication.

II
Dona Rita. Her voice Her ash tray,
The swirl of a profound illusion,
Impassable door of my dream.
I would lift up and spill my heart for her—
Let it bubble and roll about the floor before her eyes.
Grace, age old; clusters in my throat,
For I have overheard her voice . . .
There grows oblivion for dreams
for golden arrows . . .
Her profanity is insufficient to receive my adoration.
Relinquish. Gone Gone
Gone ten years deep,
Song still stirs from her lips,
Songs of scorn, Songs of wrath
Heard in far skies . . . beneath years . . .

Again, a gold and iris screen . . . Korin:
Pleasure for the tranquil vision,
Soft gold and softer iris,
The fine design in the old manner,
And a high chief among the more lasting moods.

And now from the murk of my heart's night
The clear voice crying, crying
"My genius is no more than a girl."
Beauty, sprung from a sure and careful throat,
"Charm, smiling at the good mouth;"
And for this grace of thine
"The shadowy flowers of Orcus
Remember thee." . . .

Surely there are no greater gods than these . . .
But on this there is cause for despair;
I feel their daggers grinding in my belly,
I will put a stick in the angry porridge,
I will dig, spew them out
And I hope you will like them.
I don't.
For I have lived with them a long while,
All my life have I lived with them,
   Borne their insults,
Borne their insults and their perjuries,
Borne their unappeaseable concupiscence;
For their cause borne my dishonour;
   Borne their love of incest
   And their love of slaughter.
Slaughter; they have slaughtered dreams.
   I have borne them hardly
   Choked on a bitter smile.

Toads: gods. Built obese of excrement;
They are fed overfull of my body;
   Gnawed past the belly
   On occasion they shall devour my head.
I am not unconsold,
   For then they shall ever go hungry.

April 5, 1922
FLOWERS
Here lives that hard land of the lurid flame-dark dreams where there are small damp flowers against beetling rocks.

I sit in the dark of my room.

Look, the chase; men naked chasing naked men; on whom fingers ache like claws. Look

at one man bowed square on an eminence, whispering to the tough wind, "I that was flame withered the flowers, the stiff blooms scratch at the heart, prayer over ashes—my burning blood. If you will come into this famine oh my love and have pitiful tears, if your wrath bubbles like my wrath at the world and has tears also, there will be a plant start out of the baked rock whose roots shall crack the fitful world. Prayer over ashes, the hard root burns like a molten jewel."

The tough wind fritters away, ruffling the light with fragments of dark cloud.
Fluttering feathers of air
Drop from the heavens rare,
Finger my face that is worn,
Wrinkled with care that was born
Out from the womb of life,
Kisses my lips; and the strife
Calms, and declares a peace:
Furrows and lines uncrease.
Vanished satiety;
Silence, serenity.
Moments that pass! Are not
Moments eternity?

July 30, 1921
FROM JORDAN'S DELIGHT

I
Take sight for sweetness in this biling year,
take second sight of trite things put aside:
take sea-pride that in growing salts to fear;
take land-fear that will flower off in pride.
But not in play. Oh tend your garden where
twice daily only sea is left to spare.

All broken ground and ledges to the east
awash and breaking, this island has a loom
never to be forgotten from the west
and never to be left without sea-room:
a loom of splintered cliffs that flare
black always, blacker in moon-lost air.

All’s weather here and sure, visible change;
it is the permutation of the stone,
the inner crumbling of the mountain range,
breathes in our ears sea-râle and moan.
It is as if at heart Montaigne must share
sun-calm with the storm-calm of Baudelaire.

II
Sun warms the flesh, but in the marrow, wind;
the seagulls overhead and neater tern
scream woodthrush in the birches out of mind.
How warm a marrow cold enough to burn!
There is no shelter here, no self-warm lair
when every lung eddies the ocean air.

Flowers do better here than peas and beans
and Santayana overshadows Marx;
reason a glitter flowing blues to greens
beyond the offshore shoals gains ocean darks.
The poor within us climb the cliff and stare
through second eyes and are sea-beggared there.
III
O flowering mosses
flowering stone
above the barnacles and sea-urchins
above the lichen and the washing weed
the slow heave the pull the give and lift
O fugitive
quiet almost it is so far and freed
translucent waters are
when the wave crosses

above them all on the vain edge
we crawl O flowering cliff
and look you down
heave and give to the easy all uneasing swells
look where if you fall
O blessed Francis

such is the red stonecrop
the purpling pink sea pea
the blue legume with bluest bloom
and blue harebell
laced in the fissured dripping rock
where if you fall
falling and calling

tenacity of fingers
of suddenly resourceless eyes

so frail so far O Francis
this and the flowers are
so long it lingers
this good and evil chance is
you batter and you welcome drown

IV
Here men wear natural colours, mostly blue,
colour of fusion, shade of unison,
colour of nothingness seen twice, seen new,
colour the gods must be when there are none:
colour of succour and mirage, O snare
and reservoir, alone and everywhere.

Here infamy is dust and here renown,
elsewhere a smother of the morning press,
is to the day's calthumpian day's crown;
Shakespeare not Milton praised this waywardness:
  John Falstaff was quotidian King Lear,
  Speculum Mentis Tempest to his ear.

V
Wayward the wind weighs
for us who merely be
westly on warm days
eastly to rough the sea

Here wayward men have come
some twelve on the rock beach
to split a salvaged drum
red rum and ruddy speech

here one came all undone
shirt out and jaw askew
slipping jarred his gun
and blood ran ruddy too

What blood was that what gale
what yelling belling cry
what signal in wind's wail
what fading in what eye

Wayward the wind weighs
for us who merely be
Caliban north these days
Miranda all asea

The blessed man got up
from rum and lobster ran
huge to the north cliff top
and giant there began:

heaving the island down
heaving the belly word
fragments of a fool’s crown
until he fell and snored

Who shall the sleeper mock
who smoothe his thinning hair
O eddy of the whorled rock
O eddying headlost air

VI
Some irony out of the common mind,
some wisdom gathered, and returned, like night,
saw half-united, half at odds, the blind
conjunction in the name, Jordan's Delight.
   what Jordan's that?--Some journeyman of despair
lived here and died fishing foul weather fair.

And what delight?--Some bleak and gallant face,
lonely in words, but under words at home,
might look, might almost see, a first wind-trace,
what hardness rock and flower overcome.
   It is the sea face that we hidden wear
so still, rises, rejoices, and is bare.
GODS
Stark, where the bleak hills break the sky,
Stark, where the black cliffs sound the sea,
Stark, on all high places
The old gods dwell
And shudder with the winds
At the wildness of their ways.

Feb 9, 1922
Graciously were lips upon my eyes:
Lightly in that unearthly dark your mouth
Hung over the closed lids, their double lives
Fluttering were deliciously uncouth.
Drinking, drinking—the flesh would ever burn,
You be ungorged utterly of dream;
Or I, how wholly floating, would never turn
From enchanted life (tenderly so slim.)

Gracious your streaming lips, which opening
Were of these my eyes most thoroughly the home—
Wound within wound, my love swallowing
My love.

(O deeply is this song tomb
Where life exquisitely is drunken girl
Luminously kissed one ocean’s mirth.)
The grave grace of her voice,  
The sad vibration of the words—  
A girl had spoken  
Believing the adoration I expressed.

On her side relinquished,  
Still clings the first sincerity;  
And on the lost fragility  
The heart chokes.

Her hair a fine dark mass  
Silken as the melody  
in the Andante movement  
Of Schubert’s seventh symphony;

Strung high,  
Floating in the dry still air;  
To be drunken so!  
What cool cafe  
Has wine as rare

The immobile Dolores murmurs,  
Beauty, her clear contralto,  
Aloof, behind an age firmer  
In the finer faith than the all to  
Modern machinations of the present day.
Grace, given of her sadly,  
The words, born of a tired wisdom,  
Stir, vibrating a little madly,  
Soothing the hungry eardrum,  
Torn, nearly broken, by the insane fray.
IV
Clear charm of the dead world, be swift.
Before my lust succumbs to sorrow’s charge,
Return, to my distraction, the lost gift;
And for the blackness of my present dirge
Replace that beauty wrought by careful song.
I, in the close of reverie, have heard
The voice and caught the vision; and the throng
Of their desire has bound me on a word.—
Charm,—and not the charm of candied girls—
The charm of bitterness before the smile,
Of naked laughter wrung from foam shot air.
Appalling, charm of gone ages whirls;
High, from a cliff, the writhings of clear sea’s wail.
And, among these charms, my last despair.

June 21, 1922

V
as the cadence of our nearness
grows more ever soft
than death
the play of hollows over hollows
deepening
finds our pool;

and carelessly now
our body drifts
beneath all visible walls
and in some high dark cavern
reaches long
in lost profundity.

VI
Through sound and above sound
forever and forever, friend,
thy voice moves;

before the soft scowl
of thine anger
moves;
and so ever gently stirs
from the high charm
of thy so moderated smile.

And in the growth of column
beneath the spoken word,
the shudder of thy heart.

VII
If night devours thy breath
and smothers up thy sleep,
beyond the savage dark
Remember the high cliff
of my loneliness.

Those things that crawl over the night
to flick on thy soft skin
leaving, through dawn, their moods:
are of me, surely.
Remember them.

VIII
In sheet and new sheet,
In the high surface and far fall
Foam swings over rocks
Uplifting alone the conquered headland.

Water sways again to old heights,
Hours throttle, precipitate, their throats;

And still the dying promontir
Clambers over dead sands,
Clambers up from grey seas
Breaking, breaking her shrine for despair.
b MS Am 1880 (20)

POEM

Her cunning hands
  fluttering
  (like paper ships in the air)
above my hair
tweaked a strand or two:

the thin vibration
  whispering
ran through my veins

  (as summer rains
  the words I heard
  were warm)
  stuttering
how sobs may rub.
Here I have overheard
her shoulders brush the gauze
she wore
—as poplars through an August dawn
retain the breeze.

I pause
and think she fell against me
whispering
of mountain waterfalls
and summer fountains
—her voice their scented mist.

Grief over memory
overlays oblivion.
HURON CANOE SONG

For he was away
and drank from foreign skies
and sent his messenger
the grief which moved her arms
and streamed her hair
black behind her flowing body
through the troubled night.

Her voice rose
and fled over the waters
and above the desolate forest
of the world,

and caught in her god's throat
and cried out for him.
IN THE GARDEN: THE CHILD

"This is my latter end, to walk in a garden: to consider plants and their roots and thoughts and their roots and the little feelers which connect roots with the earth.

"Sometimes I take up a root in my hands verbosely, and rub off its feelers gently when the sun has baked it. That is a god. I put god in my pocket and pass my fingers over the lump it makes. Often I gloat over my god. He is like the man Christ and has lost all touch with the earth. I gloat on Christ also who was once prehensile with feelers, who was loveable when the earth dutched him. Since one can no more love or fear them it is good to gloat on gods. But I am an earnest man and peculiar and it may be wrong for other people: to me the roots of this ragged garden are at once the source and end of life.

"When it rains I stand out here with my bald head and think of kisses. What is the difference? The sound, the freshness, the permeation of plants, and the swelling roots. And for kisses of the other sort there are blind passionate rains when the vegetation is flattened out and aches and writhes for release Besides, lips are ripe pods.

"There is a child comes here when it rains and gets tangled up in that thicket and dies. That is because I have done murder all my life: the thicket is my soul, which I have left open to wanderers and marauders of all kinds.
The child who dies here is a bastard of mine and boasts a special beauty of her own.
—You will forgive me my vagaries, young man; you have doubtless your own progeny to bury: you begin early in life—do you not?

"But that little girl wears a red dress and scampers about in this solitude with exquisite grace; and when I shroud her I notice her baby breasts, just blossoming, and I consider the great perfection of the dead.

"But that is when it rains and the ground receives easily the straight body and you are tempted to get into the grave yourself and pull down the sods over your head. But when it is so cold the very ghosts desert you and you are called out in the night to dig up from the snow a fresh corpse —that is another matter; you trip over too many roots, for one thing, of the winter-slain gods.

"You do not think of kisses or of breasts or of the fertility of life. You sit in your great-coat rocking a stiff, discoloured thing in your arms that was once beautiful, and you think —how scarce a dream is life. This that sprang out of your loins in a great moment is now dead and another desolation blackens the world. and your blood fails you and you cannot even lament the death, for it was in you that this child died this night. Ah, we are undertakers, dear my friend, of everything we make except ourselves.

"But you know all this for yourself, you will forgive me for talking . . .

"But if you will come over to the other end
of this garden I will show you a different thicket
where there lie hidden the dead whom no man buries
lest they should eat him in his grave.--Come."
POEM

In the half-light of this place

(beneath the glittering dark
    froth of her hair)
her shaded face—
her already ruined life—
flows with sorrow:

a memory of bells
in the spilt air

heavy with hurt
with dream.
The Land that Men have Lost.

I will arise and go away beyond dark skies,
Beyond these frozen bodies of the sun's cold ray;
For I have chosen peace and white surcease
And not the gilt increase, but flowers that wilt
In hours of langour and ease.

Never more the clangour of a tinny trumpet
Shall I fear to hear; for clear,
Shall I hear the sorrow of the breathless seas.

I will away and dwell in the land that men
have lost,
A land where all is fair, and nothing there
to trouble me,
This land beside the sea.

And there shall I deny the power of the pearl;
For I shall drink the wet of the wave's white curl,
And for a lily's sigh forget the maiden's cry;
And I shall bare my body to the breakers' blow
And lose in fresh delight the pain of long ago.

Of feathery dreams will I build me a home,
A home in the crest of the foam-white foam,
And die content in a star-lit dome.

I will away and dwell in the land that men
have lost,
A land where all is fair, and nothing there
to trouble me,
This tomb within the sea.

Jan. 11, 1922
THE LUSCIOUS NIGHT
The luscious night my soul possesses:
Its winds are wandering wisps of air
That brush my eyes with soft caresses,
Then whirl away to their hidden lair
Among the lake-like cloudinesses,
To swoon and slumber liquidly there.

Amid a haloed pool of blackness
The cold and maddening moon aloft,
Awakes and lights the murky darkness,
And sheds its radiant gloom so soft,
And makes deep shadows about my loft
That fill my mind with fancied strangeness. . .

September 8, 1921
POEM

Maimed with the long years
and her voice swift with echo
she came against him crying,

I was then
the green husk of a girl,
I was new and unpressed by earth
and the hard pain of birth.
I was that treasure sheafed
with youth, fed by the slender rains
of spring.

Look how my breasts bleed.

She split her yellow husk
and bared the withered seed.
MARE MEUM

When the dusk of the death of the day is
Fain to make feckless the flame of the sun;
When the reddening clouds in their glories
Fade in the fading of light and are done;
When the gloaming in glooming is ghastly,
Purple and dim in the distance of time
    Arises the sea so sadly
    In mad naked rhythm and rhyme.

Oh sheen of the moon was thy mother;
    Born from the burning red lust of the skies;
And the wailing wild wind was thy brother:
    Born of incestuous love I surmise
That thou wert; for thy flaming is flaring
    Fresh as the flesh of the flaring bright stars;
    Thine eyes are as gem-like, glaring,
    As valiant and vicious as Mars.

And thy flesh is as smooth as the moon is,
    Cream like and liquidly moist as the glow
Of the glistening sand of the shore is;
    White and supreme as the mystical flow
And the foam of delicious caresses;
    Lither and richer than limbs are thy lips:
    The kiss of thy tresses blesses
    And drains away pain in its sips.

And thy lips are sharp carven and cruel:
    Kissing they cut, and are sucking in blood;
They are lapping and dripping in drool,
    Sweet, and as ripe in the slime of the flood
As a snake in the thicket of lovers;
    Breasts that are liquid like music from lyres...
    Thy feminine form uncovers:
    Thy soul is a flaming of fires.

As a woman thou fadest: an ember
    Changing to dust as all dying thngs must;
As a woman I cannot remember . . .  
   Soulless is dead and is damned to dust.
As the sea thou arisest in glory;  
   Coming a wild and immutable form,
   The song of the sea is hoary,  
   And great in its glory: a storm.

Yea a storm! for a storm is tremendous,  
   Shaking and breaking and crushing the skies
With respirings and shriekings stupendous.
   Earth is bemoaning in crying surprise
At her fate from thy waves and her failing,
   Answering not but in sighs; when the sea
   Is wed with the wild winds wailing
   All else is enslaved and unfree.

Now the waters are washing the wisps of  
   Whiteness once flesh on white sands in the gloom;
For the sea is a queen and her due of  
   Tribute is cast on the shore for a tomb;
And each breaker has songs as it rushes,  
   Bringing its burden of bodies less souls,
   On shore; for the sea has blushes
   For none of the dead of its tolls.

Yea the sea is a sea of a quiet  
   Moaning that murmurs soft tunes in the night
'Neath the moon mid the starriness' riot;
   Dumbed for a moment the drums of the fight,
She is sobbing, her life is so endless;
   Born of her brother the sky, and the moon
   Her mother, her life is deathless—
   Her song is eternity's tune.

And the sound of thy song is resounding,
   Dim and remote an ineffable sea;
Art more agèd than age in corrupting
   Virtues to vices in virtuous key;
Hast nor virtues nor vices, begotten
   Good not nor evil, nor living nor death,
   And sinning thou hast forgotten
   In one of the sucks of thy breath.
While the swirl of the sea is in whirling,
   Eddying, rushing along the white shore,
While the foam crested waves are encurling,
   Tossing and breaking in shuddering roar
And reverberate swift in dull surging,
   Ages are fading and swooning away;
   While mortals their lives are purging,
   Thou livest thy life of a day.

Yea the sea is a goddess immortal,
   Buddha and Christ are as dead in thy sight,
And I hear in thy throat of the rattle
   Rattling oh Christ! So away with thy light;
For thy faith is a faint and a feckless
   Flame for me now; and no longer my king;
   All hail! oh dead Christ! But reckless
   I worship the sea, and I sing:

"May I rest on thy bosom forever,
   Sucking thy breast for the food of my life;
May I sleep, and depart from thee never,
   Die there away from the flood of the strife;
May I drink of thy blood as a lover
   Eagerly sating and sated of thee;
   When dead may my dust dissever
   And rush with the waves of the sea!

Oct. 30, 1921
Moods and Recognitions

I
The spun funny eyes
of that girl
yawn
feeble windows
dive down darkly
and yet
Cobalt splash bolt
and the scorch prevails

Why
does she twist that shudder

II
Turn softly, wings of trees,
but not so razor soft.
Your breath bears over still—
to sever a new leaf from my breast:

the flayed air
the hurt dark atmosphere
the swooping curve of night—
spiral deep gyrations

The wing's winds smother.

III
Breathe on my face, Jove:
For your corpse is warm wax still.

The scream of your death
Struck eager portals down,
Smothered my small whispers;

And now awakening
I would cling to your ghost,

but frailly.

IV
High, high—and ever high:
the grey pool of cooled air

gulf

the chancel of smooth thoughts

muttering  muttering

a blanket of small sounds

From the swords of ten thousand hearts.

V
Diamonds in the dark,
   Pin points of space:—
That they now dancing mark
   A frigid grace,
A newer revelation
   Of night’s true face,
And showing perturbation
   In the darkness’ pace;
Towards the whim of death
   Their flashes race,
Now swirling down my breath
   They me erase.

VI
Dark mutter fragile,
   Twisting sleep:
Deem how the agile
   Wind sneers;
The boom of deep
Air leers,
Grinding down his soft derision.

In soared decision
Glass buckles
Her timid strokes;
Air suckles
Wolves, and pokes
His snicker through the throat of vision.
Now grin, my folks!

VII
Now that her sky had anger
My heart rose in her clamour and was dark,
And then sped by that spur
My mind leapt the spiralled air's arc
and was dark.

"O death deliver us!"
The torn murmurs of deep smoke and murk:
"Peace comes after us,
Peace, repose wherein no manner of work
shall bother us."

The voices, words of brood,
Opened, broke forever down the bulwark
Of dreams, the strained mood,
I fell softly through soft pools of dark
and was dark.

VIII
In these so dangerous deep moods
Your body leans backward
In dark irrevocable play,
And so, stretched awkward,
Range over the precipice,
Held safe by an age sweet kiss.
And after enchanted interlude
So frailly falls from our way.
IX
Now Gargantua, that giant, droops;
Coiled up from desert sores the one splurge
Of two dark ages—now our laughter stoops,
To angered foetuses, through filthy urge;

And of the gallows' corpse diastisis
Behooves the sheepish torrent, the wet smile,
Whose engulfing yawn betrays our lost abyss—
And the grimacings of our jokes defile.

X
You would speak softly of that night
Wherein we found our pain and our love's blight.
      Ah, my lady, we were divers then
And came up to find the day too bright.

There was too much pallor in our play
And more wrought marble than educable clay—
      It had been this egotistic age again
That counselled all the pauses in our way.

The heat that shook your hands die on my lips
And there rang dissonance from our thighs and hips.
      My lady, hearts are of solitude, and old,
And shall endure alone their last eclipse.

So when I brushed my fingers of your skin
Or shaded the straight whiteness of your shin
      Your heart lay steady and your flesh lay cold,
Tranquilly your mind’s high violin.

XI
Now this medallion affirmed—
In the wounded high suppression,
The tortured frons of her fern—
Affirmed her glow of impression;

In her that scant costume,
The strained attentive poise,
Risen newly from some heart’s tomb,
Hovering drowns down her eyes—
Piano fall, the polonaise,
The murmur through microphone:
Her, Cynthia’s, past days
Hat crumbled through ten men’s din.

Now presently bewildered
And old, she had lain
Beneath her cabin steward—
So, muttering, shifts her weather vane.

XII
Cobalt in that cloud—and gloom.
Hear so, how many throats corrode
In this spun splash and leap of spray!
Gather now down, shadows for tombs,—
Murk of a sea’s night and brood,
So flung from the high far swooning way.

Darker, black as Buddha, surge,
The whir and thud; her laughter breaks . . .
I pour my portion of despair,
And see my soul spread out her smudge,
And feral, send me little clicks
Snickers from the cobalt air.

XIII
My heart has imparted four books for your ears—
Of which one spun and sputtered black birds,
And another the mere spiral of thundered sound,
And a third that dealt with rushing years;
The fourth, scarlet in adorned words,
Was veneration from new ground.

Now am I going early and ever to rest—
May be you will dust my books for the space of two years.

XIV
I dug small pitfalls for your feet,
And wove cunning snares for your fingers:
I sought at all hours for tricks.
Blameless am I;
For it was your lips talked coloured words in my head
Saying, There is much virtue in many dishonours.

We played a hard game for a season,
But the stakes were too small,
And now I shall climb colder heights
Where there is rarity of atmosphere,
And an absence of tricks.
If I were you I would look down in a smooth pond.

XV
That you and I have spoken is enough.
That I have stroked your neck is also good.
We loved ourself.

Why then this last rebuff?

Now I had thought, you surely understood,
I know you knew my very shadow yours—
and you left me
diving deep from sad shoals.

Did you believe that absence always cures?—
my love,—
for only those of shallow souls.

It is more on overhearing that I deem
your voice has grace,
than in the murmured sound;
it is behind the lidded eye
your looks,
utterly, beloved, so ever seem
sure possessed of beauty.

I have found
it is your eyes detain my mind from books.
XVI
Whose mountains throw more dust than thou,
Before thine eyes' soever aching swirl,
hights of dawn, on our arising, fade,
shudder
before thy spirit's cannonade.

Lady, thy stride batters down the light.
Creatures, beloved, we,
sprouts of gloom,
divers ever for profounder blight.

And thou, blacker than I.
Scorn of doom
Sounds in the slow thunder of thy voice;
menacing surge of angry seas
grows
in dark voids of thy words.
Thus our choice
lies in greeting pleasure.

Thy mind knows
how futile—
strivings to obtain all lusters;
but one day we shall cover them with our dusts.

XVII
Who's cause for my shuddering but you?

I reflect severity for grace
on your demand:
for your straight face,
for coolness of you lips, for that view,
for one hint of your aloof high speaking scent
over refrain from warmer sacrament.

Now that you have my heart on its spoon
shall my caresses seem so importune?
Shivering beneath your star shrill cry,
beneath the skilled affliction of your gaze,
that shudder you despise escapes 
and I
revolt from lost obscurity to ways
where desert acres of the sea
are dry
in pain 
till the kiss of your cold lip decays.
POEM

Now while I loosed and rose from hell
The sunless afternoon turned green,
Turned in strands of grandiose and lean
Shadows—an ill vermilion green.

The muddied note of a bell
Compelled the tiny afternoon
To wind her soapsud hair,
Compelled the frightened afternoon
To braid her soapsud hair
In silly twists
Like a brick layer's wrists.

And all the while, and all the while I loosed
   and rose from hell
The sunless afternoon turned green,
In grandiose and lean
Penumbrae—an ill vermilion green.

And a muddied bell proclaimed
The afternoon in quarantine.

And all the time, the fumble of her hair—
Her braided soapsud hair—
Leaned down my throat and thickened there,
—And slowly turned me green.
O FEVER GODS THIS MONTH

In this ocean of proud air
the earth reels with the brown
the ripe
coil of your life, love;

and of you the winds trail completely . . .
from your bursting rich baloon,
How strongly
utterly in by gentle god.

Filled I of this
— of you floating
there wholly away,
and I say
    you
cannot hide.

27 March 1923
OF MERCIES

I
It is that men may climb their look-out towers
Even yet, in these late days, to search
The quiet reach of sea and sky, and feel
Comforted in their simple solitude;
That men may stand, high on granite headlands,
And have their eyes and skin swept clean and bare
For once. It is that I may climb some rock,
Some difficult dark pile of rock, and find
Some niche straight above the surf, and wait there
Till night spread shadow over everything;
When, in gradual movement, like the tide's,
My mind would rise and fill itself with a simple sense
Of how my life looms like the black of night,
And how at last the quiet night and sea
Will keep me cool and tranquil while I sleep.

II
That the world is sometimes such that one may walk
Through city streets upon an afternoon
And see a droll bright child behind a window,—
That one may smile, be smiled at, and go on.

III
That a man may find success n death at least,
When ruin overwhelms him, and that his works
Will live and stir within his children's bones;
That vanity maintains itself secure
And grows more beautiful in history
Than it had ever been in simple action.

IV
That in an April dawn a man may wake
And hear the ghost of music whispering,
Through slender breeze, for miles around his house
Among unclosing leaves of waking trees;
That he may rise then and look on desolate
Wastes, streets where people walk by day,
And see how nothing retains identity  
In early dawn, and feel that he himself  
Escapes his name and face the while he looks.

V  
That even if our present ladies died  
We yet would have the deathless girls Matisse  
Has lately shown—his lucid Spanish Head:  
The oval even face, with desperate eyes;  
The firm cool arms gliding through the air  
In sure design; the hidden loveliness  
Beneath the exquisite cloth—so deeply known;  
And the whole set about with arrowed silk  
To give her strength and make her beauty brave:  
The picture, the measure of experience,  
Something as simple and miraculous  
As light, one image wherein our ladies live.

VI  
That we may offer easy violence  
Of word and gesture to the tawdry race;  
That a desert is not empty, once it's known;  
That the speed of cleverness is truly stupendous,  
Explores oblivion before the wisest;  
That there is honour, holy tragedy,  
In hypotheses against eternity;  
That sculpture ranks the scissored silhouette . . .  
That one may climb one’s look-out once again.
I have been long enough at home to hear
How houses grow more still with months; to see
How paper browns and cracks on walls; I fear
The mask that old age wears. Cautiously
I should have left my house before its leer
Had drawn of welcome's smile a travesty,
When the door was open, and I was free
To go, and there was little to hold me here.

I should have gone away and left what dust
Had shed from me to be at rest. I stayed,
And the walls withered. I can no more than trust
To fade but half so fast as the hours fade,
Treasuring such memory as I
Find unannihilated by my life's lie.
Parfum Exquise de la Mort
What was it dear that killed you?
  Was it too much love of love?
Or dream of death that filled you
  With the rapid breath thereof?
  Or was your fancy dying,
    And your loving lying? . . .
I woke in liquid darkness
  Melting into  pallid light;
I turned and touched the starkness
  Of your gleaming body white
    Upon the bed of flowers
      Now no longer ours,
But merely mine forever.
Perfume blew about the room
  More sweet than I had ever
Felt before, diffused the gloom
    In colour green and yellow,
      Drained my heart quite hollow.
I laughed aloud; my laughter
  Seemed inhuman, like the fumes
Of thy delight; hereafter
    Laugh I shall not save in tombs—
      In glacial tombs where death is
        Dying; where thy breath is
Reborn for new repiring—
  Other immortality,
Like thine and mine, expiring. . .
Fades, the perfume fades; a sea
    Of passion wakes and brightens
      Bright thy body boughten.
I rise and sink, and madly
  Kiss thy cold and carven lips;
Thy ghastly lips quite gladly
  Seem they like to suck in sips
    Alike the sucks of blowing
      Breezes never slowinng,
But ever, ever rising,
  Wafting weary life away
To dark of old devising. . .
  Cold, and bitter sweet, a fay,
    Thy corpse a gleaming jewel
    Odorous and cruel:
I kiss thy breasts, and crushing
  Them, extract and suck the breath
Unique from out their blushing
  Tips: the breath divine of death
    More rich than crushèd flowers
    Felled by phantom mowers.

  Ah, sweet, thy breath is doom!
    Thy loveliness my tomb.

[con vivace - preciosa]

Nov. 15, 1921
PIANISTE

Before the leaning neck the dusk
clarity—the face and hair of her

(upon what earthly slenderness
the bard prow)
her life’s shadow
leaves of her laurel wreath
clear-cast
have been forever falling

(From narrow mouth
and narrowed lids
ringing—the arrows
of sight and quiet sound.)

Her brave defence.
PLAIN CHANT

All love has ruin for an end:
  Two spectres twist their lips:
All love has ruin for an end:
  Two spectres bite their lips:
No love has quiet for an end.

The eyelids of dead passion stir:
  Two spectres squint their eyes:
The murmurs of dead passion whir:
  Two spectres’ eyebrows rise:
All love has ruin for an end.

Forgotten words of him and her:
  Two spectres writhe for breath:
Flowers of remembered lips
  Two spectres snatch at death:
All love has ruin for an end.
THE PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN

This little thing, a space of years, has changed
My friend remarkably. He dries and withers,
Fades and sinks further into himself
Visibly, silently, with small complaint
Of either word or gesture. Look where he sits.
Against the velvet cushion of his chair
He rests his head, and waits and waits, is resting;
In the thin flame of unfriendly premonition
Is testing the constancy of one desire,
Is feeling the mad force of life-long attachment
Against the sudden fall gaping before him—
Those tumbling miles of dark.

This I have seen;
Not once, or on occasion merely, but ever—
Ever and always, joining year on year
This last decade.

Yet little happens; days remember days,
Simulacra of many gods appear.

My friend is very old. Privations, wounds,
The full fruit of the years, now ever his.
His age accords no privileges to him,
But ever the new burdens pile upon him,
Pile and heap heavily over him.
To me these burdens are but tawdry phantoms,
Things that I could forget with a slight effort,
But my friend is very old, much older than I,
His body very frail, frailer than mine,
So little things weigh heavily upon him.
Things I would banish with a careless snap
Of finger and nail, push his burnt-out eyes
Further back into their aching sockets.

He fidgets, sometimes, beneath their tireless pressure;
And on occasion mockery emerges—
As in the old days, against a surfeit,
Mockery and derision, his favoured tools,
"Risible, this colony of souls,
Floating." So floats the naked voice I hear.
I watch his head, his high and narrow head
Straining a little upwards from the throat,
I see his closing lips cut his words,
I see his steadied eyes illuminated
By the still pool of careful thought behind them.
I notice the pale segments of his skin
Marked by tortuous wrinkles, crevices
Split by lonely thoughts. My friend is old,
His skin is like the frosted grass of fall—
Shrinking, shrinking and slivering itself,
Held fast to life by plain perversity,
Taking knowledge of its last vanity.

"No other ache could be as bearable
As memories, as these my floating souls . .
Could be as risible and terrible . .

"My fathers carried dirks, those ready weapons;
I cannot cleanse my laughter of its blood.
My fathers howled upon bleak hills, and I
May treasure levity, deceitful ruse;
The which no voted effigy can preserve . . ."

Look at him now. The gods are lovable
Reward the eye, impoverish the dream:
A withered remnant of old elegance,
A monument above retired disasters,
A weary and suffixed bitterness to wisdom.

And this in clarity of pleasant dusk,
A blue, minute clearness giving age,
Number, and dimensions in soft acuteness.
And all words float in thin keen drone
The wind lifts from the song of rising tide.
And this, ruined and wounded architecture,
Amont these—and is yet not wholly botch,
Is yet a little more, a little more
Than vaporous exhalation of old dung.
It is my friend, and he is very old,
So old his age has blanched and shrunk his heart
Until it seems a gnarled and grisly root
Tugging within him. It is his age has warped him,
And one condones devices toward protection.

Sometimes, from silence, a sudden desolation;
From dread misfortune of thought's audacity,
Discovering the manifest relation
Of word to matter, a sudden desolation
Invades the blue dusk.

"An old man lives alone and warps himself;
Disjunct, dissociate from totality,
Lives alone. Look how my family
And friends are gone, dead and above all dead;
And therefore is my service false, a surfeit.
I know . . . since being born you laugh and stare,
You delicately laugh and cry and say,
'He wears, he wears his heart upon his sleeve.'
And there will always be one of you to say
(Among the tawdry smoke of human voices,
A stuttering, a fluttering of ice):
'How queer, and what a crooked heart our friend has!
See how it warps and twists, dangles and shakes!
Look now. See how the ends of time and chance
Instal their rusted wedge, and advance!
And you will see, if you look you'll see quite plainly
How the bruise deepens, how the flower wilts. . . .
He thinks he lives, and his own breath betrays him.'

"Now tell me, and do you think, my thoughtful friend,
And do you think I do not hear such words?
My belly stirs my hands, my fingers pluck,
My fingers pluck and exacerbate my brain
Till I am all a writhing agony . . .

"And now you see what levity will do,
My friend,—beget a grinning caricature
Which will not own its usurpation wrong.
You sensitive modern pups believe too much:
Look, I'm quiet, in peaceful contemplation—
Quiet, conjecturing my final arrangements,
Preparing, waiting for the last estrangement,  
In perfect readiness. Cast that abroad  
Hurl a noisy peace upon the world.  
Do that at least. My gratitude is yours.  
But wait. For motto: Anacreon senex es."

Whence laurel leave have been forever falling,  
From under rocks in mountain territory.

My famous friend is very old, old,  
And is now most a naked skull, unwreathed,  
Whence hooded eyes do stare their double force:  
Jewels of life, bright gems for his casket.
THE RADIANT POOL

While the wind and the wind songs pass him by
We would fall and let his body lie
Calm and crumpled—
Spreading only as the shadow spreads,
Moving only as the shadow moves,
Breaking dim from his waning sun,
Sending ripples of red radiance
To awaken the green aura of dusk.

He would fall and let his bodies lie—
In heart of hearts the deepening pool
Of lies and half squandered truths,
Of ineffectual fancies fluttering
From the emanations of phantasmal memory,—
In the interplay
    dart of worn syllables,
The lisp of faint previsions and decisions:
In these he would be still,
He would be silent that he might remember
And remember and respond.

—the buried,
The half-rendered audition,
The fragility of moisture enmirrored
Dim, the penumbras of smoke
In delicate opacity an image;
Knowing all response chance-wrought
And a glaze intractable,
He would respond
("Quite out of place amid
Resistance to current exacerbations.")

Baffled by the mere flood of intrusions,
To clarify his tautened emotions
He eliminated the more redundant of conclusions
And at last knew—
For his dust should he weep,
Lest his chest retch
For the cruel births of spring,
So from his lust-shaken pores
He should bleed the perspiration of desire,
Experience thus a more novel torture.

See how my life has hedged me in
To wear the agitation of a grin—
The dying lips of the dying smile.
Now how crookedly as a crooked pin
That perturbation falters;
How it alters;
How its leaning lean spiral falls.
(The bright swathe of the fall
Lays bare the pale roots of death,
Resurrecting the least image of silence
The inviolable white heart of him
Who is utterly laughter and whim,
Who is shadow burning,
Who is our desert's flower,
And in whom our fire consumes—
For is not surely my belly's pool but death's pool
As my groin's pool is surely life's pool?)
And see how its expression thins.
How it circumscribes and hides the snarl
Beneath the surface grace:
Tremolo of fear
The stutter. God's fluttering tears
(shaken from cold eyelids
the pearls.)

His voice a vibrant violin
Of sorrow choked with laughter; breaking
Down from thought (the microphone
For the but faintly audible tone)
His lips had spoken, covering
The flood of silence with pale sound,
Transcending stillness with cool life,
So that his eyes were softly bathed,
And the magic light enveloped him—
While grace, for a moment, stirred,
Shook her slim shoulders and smiled.
—a raiment of eyes
in dark marine
of wavering blue
the distended iris
gurgling
like a water-closet bowl

that a girl, laughter gifted, smiled

(The dim contralto of the night
Accumulates perverse desires
And the curl of a girl’s finger wields
The more polished of catastrophes.)

And again from the red radiance of low light
The tentacles of words assail:
Their shadows gather and are formed,
Flooding memory with deep motion,
Instilling time mutably
With space.
I have known time, with tunic spread in rest,
Recline for seven years of sleep
And the dial be shaded once;
I have known time, with tunic gathered high,
Sweep down the full length of the years
While a sun flower turned his head:
In blooded days and bloody days
Time slept and time sped:

(For I have heard the sea tides send their glory far
And I have lain in the straight shadow of a star
Till either dream were gone:

And in each
The stroke of arid lust and ruin
Fell, like a god’s hand, heavily.)

Splintering bored bones
Hollowing dull mass
With the peace and clamour of a sunken past:
Time’s wedge reawakening the light’s heart.

At breakfast, shredded wheat and cream,
With predigested thought for sauce—
At breakfast, shredded wheat and cream;
Which leave, somehow, one's mind at loss.

So picking from the table cloth
The ends of thread with crumbs of shred,
One even wonders how such froth
Should take him from his felted bed.

And in the theatre the peal breaks,
The laughter at the tragic actor's rage;
The comic spirit of the race shrieks,
Serves to cloy the exterior inanity,
The grimace of urbanity
Apparent in the civilized community.
In the swiftness of silence
Realized, the bitter behind the veil:
The core, laughter and a botched wail,
And the lips bitten, sore . . .

And where lonely footsteps led him by the river's bank,
Blue in the rose of dawn her blinded life,
So that his belly grovelled where she lay:
A coagulated spatter of blood on her mouth
And her face encrusted with dirt;
Dust with tears; petrified,
And uncogent—not now a pristine spurt
Of the earth: she lay, too much hurt,
Dead, a newly dead whore.
So, from the piled up horror of youth's multitudes,
From whose imaginary lust the crests,
The sterile blades: to drink a knifed palate
(Then, inquisitive dog, smell it.)
From these, the whore, the dead whore, rests—
With all her outwearied bretheren, rests.

From the bodies of the trampled dead
The plea for peace, the cry for quiet,
Whose voice is ever dropping from the painted lips
of dawn.

While sorrow sings,
The dawn drifts down the sky,
While sorrow sings.

Sharp as a space born cry,
When sorrow springs
From night to drown the day
It shrivels life and shadows hope away,

For sorrow sings
Of human things.

Now from the lot of these comes trouble ever:
Ever trouble walks with lion coloured limbs,
Lurking behind me in the broken banisters
Of my falling house; and if I go from her,
From a girl her fire stirs—even in a woman’s eyes;
Or edges toward me from a twisted tree—guarding
Peace secure from my furious attempt.
She shines from the giddy lamp posts of the night,
Darts out from divers hidden places of the night,
And is the dangerous wind mood of the night:

    Dark mutter fragile,
    Twisting sleep,
    Deem how the agile
    Wind sneers;
    The boom of deep
    Air leers,
    Grinding down her soft derision;

    In scared decision
    Heart buckles
    Her timid strokes;
    Air suckles
    Wolves, and pokes
    Her snicker through the throat of vision.

Ever trouble stalks before me,
Ever trouble walks with lion coloured limbs
In either light or gloom.
Ever trouble stalks
    Ready to curl
About my throat her tawny tentacles.
And I shall never, never be ready for her.

I have dug in my heart’s earth for the light pool,
I have wallowed for four moments in her flood.

And now that her sky had anger
My heart rose in her clamour, and was dark,
And then sped by that spur
My mind leapt the spiralled air’s arc
and was dark.

"O Death deliver us!"
The torn murmurs of deep smoke and murk,
Peace comes after us,
Peace, repose wherein no manner of work
shall bother us.

I fell softly through soft pools of my light
and was dark.
Recompense.

From out a seething sea of storm
There rose a horrid, hideous form:
A mountain, of huge, gigantic noise;
My boat and I, before it: toys.
It gathered to tremendous poise,
And howled, and hurtled down from hell. . .
A crack. My boat had cracked: a shell.
I stood, and while I still had breath,
Defied my god and laughed at death:
The water laughed, and kissed my lips,
And took my life in tiny sips. . . .
Below: some crumpled flesh and bones.
Above: a harmony of tones. . .
And yet, at home, there must be moans.

July 30, 1921
SERVICE TO THE DEAD

Strangely, he dropped his hands, uncovering
His narrow face, and bared the solitude
Of misfortune in which his thought had wrapped him.
His face was naked as it had never been—
As if his skin warred against the air,
And all the air attached it and wore it down
Unto a film of fragile trembling substance
But scarcely stable. Weariness laid hold
Upon him; his head fell after his hands,
He sprawled, like a dead body, on the table.

He had been too long within himself, had stared
Too many hours out that night, to gain
Oblivion of sleep. The revenue
Of thought is sleepless nights where dead men groan
And you think their voices swords. There all the dead
Rise together and bring their emptied skulls,
And bid you hear what echo the shells sound
Of ancient dream once bright and fair as yours.

Again the dry familiar agony,
The stifled motion, beat between his bones
And dried his flesh. The thin, hard flame
Of his bitter restlessness pared down his thought
Until it seemed a dagger, razor keen,
Against his breast bone. So many dreams of the dead,
So many terrors and despairs, more live
As this late day than those his conjurings
Had raised to give his life a point of honour;
So great a multitude of fertile years
Since beauty rose and cast her countless names
Upon the world; so many days which leapt,
With a last splendour of death, into the night.
His word, against these shrines, a tawdry flame.

Came lust of beauty upon him,
the clear courage,
Bravery to wounds,
  the still vision:
Again and again
  the fragile flower mouth
His years had known
  pressed upon his lips.
The half-light of his heart
  was deep with dream
Thoroughly most strange.

Shadowy
And like a lily in the dawn, dawn gray,
The shadow-jewel of his fancy gleamed
And lit the cool and silence of his mind,
Pervaded all his wrestling world with quiet,
And let him rest. No stifling agony
Beat between his bones and dried his flesh;
His thought no longer seemed the bitter blade
Of punishment sharp against his breast bone,
But rather seemed a luminous expanse,
A space of gentle light, illuminating
Each fragile fragment of experience.
It was a light which shed serenity
Upon his sense.

He raised his narrow head,
And sat erect. Neither insolence
Against the frailty of his dream, nor fear
Of what catastrophe could come from it,
Marred his features. Now only mercy,
The exquisite mercy of the moment's peace,
More merciful than April's slender rains
Against the winter-wearied face, mercy
Only was upon him and cooled his bones,
Then like those rains was gone.

Intolerable
Falsity of vision, heavy pangs,
The terror of the final loss, caught,
Caught and held him stiff, the last strain:—
Who had surrendered once forever suffered,
Who lost the gift in giving saw the world
Rise, overwhelm itself in dreariness,
And bare the howling comedy of wars
Which kept the glamour of its surface bright.
Clamour of past wars and old ills,
The widowed beauties of the ruined nations,
Cried in his ears: the sum of old endeavours.

The sacred tawdriness waylaid and gutted
The still forms of the half-light, died of surfeit,
Maimed with the many, many mutilations,
Suffering, suffering from desecration,
Ever unarrowed by these exacerbations,
In the rare reveries the form lived on,
Lived, and maintained secure their sheer texture;
Unbaffled by cheap affronts, good fortune or ill,
Rescued, rescued from oblivion,
Lived on.

Came again beauty,
Beauty upon him,
thin and perfect glaze,
Face of selected events.

Gracile his genius swerved
And built his heart her lasting monuments.
Neither of clay nor faith are altars formed;
Utter need of escape, of pure charm
And the clear voice, replaced those instruments.

Now he there, measuring the inner poise
Against the outer weight, the hidden flame
Against the blindness of smoky irritation;
Measuring importances perceived
Against bewilderments of castigation;
Rendering refinements permanent,
Durable axims of the intellect:
Valuation above mere observation,
Order, order in these his reveries.

Helen's hand against his head, her breath
Trembling behind him, the scent of her bright hair;
A coolness, a clarity upon the air.
It was Helen only since his years
Had known so many lesser girls which strove,
Ceaselessly, to gain her place and worth:—
The futile colours with the perfect tone,
The moment’s brush with centuries of toil:
Helen against the world, the chance triumph.
Legend against trick—the solitude
Of one tall shining flower straight and proud
Above the tangled underbrush around.

Yet he had known a little loveliness
Among his women. This girl or that had shown
Her flower heart to him, had shown a spirit
Grave and sure,—in magic of her voice,
In sudden miracle of slender movement,
Or in a brief glimpse of her body’s smile.

Could a mind lay hold on these and keep them straight?
Could a mind imperfect through desire prevent
Precipitation of these images,
And keep them firm in perfect flux?
Which memory shall pattern now the dream—
The mockery of the moment’s motion
Remembered in the trembling of the flesh,
Or deeper mockery of old devotion,
The sign by which alone the first existed?

Came terror upon him,
the even lips
Cold against his head
of his dead girl:
Pressure of her revenge,
implacable
Shadow of stifled life.
Behind the lips
Intensity of voice
moved, unuttered.

Not Helen only died and lent her life
To living memory; not Helen’s name
Alone was symbol for the measurement
Of years’ courage to seize a ruined movement.
Or rather Helen was that present girl
Whose lips had pressed so cold in jealousy
Against him a moment past, whose buried voice,
Saved up through years of dizzy dreams, had lived,
A silent monument, behind her lips,
Behind the middle distance of her death.

Now he had never known that she had died,
And though this message came he disbelieved
Her death. He wished now most of all to touch
Her body, hear her inmost sigh and hope.
Yet neither came—only broken images,
Refuse and rubble, piled up by death's hand
And left to moulder in his memory,—
Only these and the cold even lips
And silenced voice. No face, no eyelids shook;
No fragrant streaming hair, no pillared throat
Or folded arms were visible to him:
Only distortions of these images
Shaded the splintered mirror of his mind,—
Distortion, and the glass of even lips.

Cain upon Abel, Helen upon love;
The vast shroud of the years enveloping
The murdered passion in oblivion.

Beauty of death upon him,
    beauty departed,
Strangling of his vision:
    The ruptured silence.
The black vomit of woe
    drowned his thought.

As if the world had bared its dreariness
And then bewailed the action, his head hurt
And rang with the deep grief of weary nations.
Through all the quaking air he overheard
The heavy echo of distant voices weeping,
And caught his own most high and loud among them.

Floating, floating in half-light, and floating,
The last scum on the perfect glaze; staring,
Her drifting features, blight against his mind;
Indifference of the lost years, moving,
Moving, destroying his tranquility,
Covering pure pallor with velleity,—
Regrettable revisions of past delights.
So moved; and alone with these his reveries,
From heart’s murk the half-even voice,
Bravery to projected shrine.

"The wind
Is wind; the water rots the floating lumber,
Preserves the buried. Water gods can laugh,
But the wind vanishes in sorrow-sighs
And is no property of life. I hear
The noise of water falls and the small winds
Which they engender. Laughter-gift and death.
Yet swift water laments her evil habits,
Cannot enjoy her progeny’s bereavements,
Her gaiety is certainly fictitious.
Think how Ophelia made the waters weep,
And truly to no end but that of conscience,
Which is at least private and honourable.

"The court is flower-strewn and empty, empty . . .
The wind bears the last echo of her song
Now to my ears, vanishing in sorrow . . .
'But our cold maids do dead men’s fingers call them,'
Which are flowers, the last ornaments of life.
Wind is wind, the water gods can laugh
And make a transmutation of their woe . . .

"The air is full and cramps itself with spirits:
Prodigies of lost moments’ splendours, shrines
Of the sudden glimpse, crowding all the air.
And there is water under foot, water
Beneath the earth where dead men lie preserved,
Where water—lilies plant their roots—in death,
In the still, unfathomed pool, in silent depth . . .
My Helen’s breasts and throat are lily-white
And water-cold, her voice is like that water
Heard in tidal caverns, deep and strange.
Why does she press her death against my lips
And whisper terror in my dizzy ears
Till I am chilled and still as she?

"The wind
Is wind; the water rots the floating lumber,
And all our lumber floats on endless seas.
Only the dreamed life shall sink and live.
Now Helen parts the water, now Helen sinks,
And there is silent water everywhere.
The court is flower-strewn and empty, empty.
The wind restores the last cadence of song.
The air is bright and trembling with her spirit.

"I have her kiss. Such kindred will not kill me,
Nor put me out of mind because she died.
I know too much whose hours are yet at hand,
The charm and glory of her vanity
Still live, and beat between my bones.
From all intrusions safe, the images
And memories to which I once surrendered
Gather and give her greater strength than all
The flowers of her years had ever known.
Their magic enters me and fills my bones.
It was her eyes first splashed a turquoise rage
In me; she drove the clamour of beauty high
And deep in me; it was her voice that spoke
With the world's age upon her lips, her voice
That cried aloud in desolation, caught
As a god's song in my throat. She lives
Ever in the shadowed hollows of my bones.

"Now Helen parts the water, now Helen sinks.
The court is flower-strewn and empty, empty.
The wind restores the full score of her song.

"Upon this altar is my service rendered."

May 1923
Singer

She builds her myth
(of me the spoken word
the fainting exacerbations
which I have heard my lips
muttering, repair)
patiently;

dearly sound upon sound slips
from her careful mouth
and shakes contralto agony
through the air

To see my being
(struck in images
her heart saves)
wakes silence
awfully.
A Song.

My fingers shivered, and my mind was mad
To hammer with mighty strokes the silver faced
gong.
The rich and shining Chinese gong,
The golden surface with the golden song.
I rubbed its center gently; my soul grew sweet,
sad;
A low and moaning sound, so long!
It seemed the time eternal when earth was born.
In sorrow for all things living I was forlorn:—
A silence, soft as the glimmering haze of morn.

written about April 1921
A TESTAMENT ON FAITH

But come now, it is like this. This is the way we touch and hinge and brush and overlap: it is the way that our lives fall together, cringe together, and fall, and fall apart— the fresh bulk of a largest wave runs slap against us, and we are free of earth; borne shoreward in the wave, borne shorewad resting together on a great pillow of waters till the hard shore stops us and the surf is flattened out in thin transparent lace.

But come; if you but listen and let my words reveal themselves unscarred by questing interruption, then maybe you will see and will not ask again why anguish mars my face before and after each and every kiss you press upon me in your great dream of grace. Ah, listen! It is like this. You must not ask. You must not question, only listen.

(And all the while I speak I watch, I look, I see your eyelids glisten dropping tiny prophecies. I think if I kept still I should know all that deepest knowledge that your silence holds a great and brimming bowl precarious before me. And yet I speak.)

But listen. You must not ask.
(This torture makes you look too droll.)
But listen.
It is like this.
I tell the whole.

The first touch when our first darkness fell, a mask
ever forever glued upon us,
signed certainly a terrible eruption,
marked certainly as onus
a sort of endless war for peace.
It is as if my body struggled ever,
ever ever upwards under sea,
and a heavy current bore me down.
Because I cannot wait until I drown
I struggle upward, and often,
in a dream a moment wraps me in,
feel almost free,
feel almost in the air.

It is like that.
We are together in our need,
and we float together.
Yet when the whirlpool whirls and sucks our feet
and overwhelms our strength again
and pulls our struggling bodies down, our greed
for life—or maybe sudden jealousy—
will make me clutch your hair,
will make you snatch my throat
between your murderous hands,
so that we drown.

Ah, do we clasp ourselves
to gain a union?
or do we wrestle?
I have seen your lips curl back
and gape around a frothing mouth,
and I have seen likewise a murderess,
with face like yours go black.
Then we are bloody, suffering communion—
we who have dreamed that we were elves,
children of our fathers’ gods
wandering in misted woodland alleys
shedding perfumes as we went.
Memories; blood stains, clotted wounds.  
Shrines; tombs of the slain gods.

It is impossible to trust another's love,  
and I would rather listen while your silence falls  
a level rain among the air I breathe,  
I would rather teach you chess  
and see your drollest eyes confess  
delicious bewilderment.  
And yet I speak.  
I do not trust.

The god lives never where the heart demands,  
the god lives never in the clasping hands,  
or lives there only as a pressure pressed  
by him who loves.  
Yet now I talk to you  
and trust you hear my words, and trust you know  
your force is sharp in all my actions.  
I must explain. It is like this.  
It's not my lips and hands,  
it is my lips against your lips, my hands  
fumbling among your hands,  
it's what of me you make your own  
that you desire.  
And how can this thing last?  
You think I bite my nose off,  
spoil my face  
for nothing.  
But think.  
When you have used me,  
sucked me dry,  
and thrown me out  
to fertilize some other's field  
with fervour of the second rate,  
with passion most adulterate,  
with mask turned inside out—  
for how can this thing last?—  
think then what kind of brittle shell I'll be.  
For how can this thing last?  
And when it's passed,  
then how shall I forget the tremors,  
the tremors and the terrors which passed
here between us,
which passed
as irrevocable as any history
of love and war?

It is impossible to trust
impossible to swear by anyone at all.

But I am tempted; I do not go.
It is like this:
I remember breezes meet and build a wind to blow
about the world.
Likewise all the trifling words we drop
so carelessly from time to time,
all the broken sentences that each of us
has finished for the other,
all the shrinkings and greetings
we have suffered time and time again,
and all the thousand hopes we did not dare discuss—
in short, all we have felt in space and time
accumulates and forms one wind
thick against our nostrils,
forms the echo of our lives
records our history.

And yet each ply of wind,
each volume of the air I deem I breathe,
is fugitive and is not breathed again,
so I can never swear I breathed at all.
It is impossible to trust,
impossible to swear by anything at all.
There are so many winds and tides, both high and low,
so great a multitude of winds and waters flow—
that of which one of them it is the rise and fall
which I forever treasure—that I cannot say.
I know surely, deeply, as I know dusk droops,
only a tangle of contacts among some shadow,
among penumbra cast by you and me,
the small, soft things of a life.

Once two people talked;
now two others think of them who passed
when their first darkness fell, a mask
forever glued upon them;
now two others grieve.

Can we, thought-weary of them who fell,
go on, and on, among the troubled rumours of their lives?

Words, words—and do you take them?
Words, sounds, the hard ruse of truth,
the bitter wind of deceit.
A sick heart babbles,
babbles and crumples with old ills.
Words, words—and do you take them?

The words harry,
the words harry, snarl like broken gods—
the fallen deities of our sunken past.
And yet I speak them.
The words harry,
the words strain, scurry, belch, spew;
charged with meaning they can never carry
pour out of my mouth perpetual vomit.
And yet I speak them.

But come now and listen,
and is it not like this?

I stand here talking,
shaping preposterous figures for our lives;
I stand here talking,
watching the grave sorrow of your loveliness
bend down silent before me,
charging my body deeper with your silence
than my words can ever charge you with their noise.

It is like this.
In these short days you have grown old
within me,
grown old and steadfast
like everything that time has left behind.
It is like this.

I do not speak any more, because my mind,
in all its emptiness,
is somehow fuller than I have ever known it.

I do not trust; and yet I do not go.

The words harry,
and leave my life behind,
almost lifeless among our past,
among the contracts of the shadows you have cast
upon it.
That being born we laugh and stare,
We laugh and cry and say, He wears,
He wears his heart upon his sleeve;
And there would be always one to say
(Among the smoke of human voices
a flutter of steel, a stutter of ice)
How queer, and what a crooked heart our friend has.
See how it warps and twists,
How it dangles and shakes like a broken wrist!
—See how the ends of time and chance
Instal their wedge,
And advance.
And you will see
(If you look you’ll see quite plainly)
How the bruise deepens, how the flower starts,
How the red deserts the rose
And the flower wilts
(For it is gangrene green that grows
Where the red hearted rose
rang deep,
And once white lilies close
Speckled lewd. I propose
we sleep.)

And in our crowded room
Again the words begin—
... being of an age, warped,
His belly stirs his hands,
His fingers pluck his brain;
His pretty afternoon decays.
In him had motion lain
Still...
The overture to laughter
Shreiks the aftermath of pain.

... being of an age, warped,
But born, he well knows, undoddering—
Yet somewhat stiff, erecting tombs for shrines
And a torn clamour shrilled for songs:
As of an old man
'Comme un tout petit garçon,'
His chill soprano scream. . . .
The swaggering clouds of laundry steam
Dull the effort; the dog declines
As the coffee boils.

His retainers are rats,
He fears the eyes of cats—
The dead balls of a dead cat’s eyes,
The jewels of death, gems for his casket . . .

. . . and do you think, my thoughtful friends,
And do you think?
In an age, warped,
How a warp can be life?

For could he smile? or could he weep?
Who drinks the laugh of night in sleep?
POEM
The climbing ardour
of these slender miles
of rare rain
this April

(the pale plain
of that our city
earthly smiles
her dolour)

crisps over
covers and invades
our wrestling mind,
coals

O does the world
shed her trouble so?
POEM

The great clutter of the dead
awards life to my memory;
death’s tooth in the other lot
wreaks silence—
the untended despair.

Bared in the hard winter of long years,
struck swift—the glitter of ice-mist
—the rocks of my remembered dead.

And I see
the bitter ceremonies
the carved lusts
of nations departed:
the stressed image firm
through the marching night.
POEM

The pale grace of weariness
suffuses air
so even emptiness
wears more ever thin
in silver streets
    (this night
        bright
        with city's dream
reverberates in notes
utterly most slim.)

I see this bath of fainting lavender,
the cloudy tinted lake of dream,
uttering
the grave indolence of man.
There are no words like the small
glimmer of woman's hands
emerging from quiet
rest to reach out
towards mine,

rising from shadowy
loneliness into the white
tentacles of life
crisp and soever
even and cool,
to say

These are the flower-
 signs you dream.

20 June 1923
These gravid eyes
  (the grace of seas
which I believe
for being blue are seas)

awake such memories
shadowy where cliffs had fallen
  silently through cobalt space

Now I of you beheld
wholly shall fall through these

(of these the radiance
the remembered charm)

Irises deepening alarm
Thou art the bird
the alone, the rare
wavering of white
wings
the sheer
trouble of ever awakening
to find the morning
great with cold

Thou art the bird
the alone
with flower
heart

of which I hear the petals
shrink wearily one upon another
beneath my foreign touch
THOUGHTS DURING A WET DAWN
Drift of pale fog across the splintered floor,
Rustle of rain
On the window pane;
The dawn has dropped a stain
Of thought

Upon the night.
Three o'clock, four o'clock—as fast as that!
There shall be no more sleep for me now,
There shall be no more repose for me now.
The drift of light has touched the door,
The door of the pale, frantic white,
The door that seems to burst from fright
At the noiselessness of dawn.

Yes; the quiet dreams have gone . . .
I wonder where they have gone to.
Have they fled with the wind
That stirred the curtains an hour ago?
I never can know.
No matter; the Amerind, the Amerind,
The people who built this land a few thousand of years ago,
The Amerind peoples have come . . .
They stand in the air and look at me, dumb.
They seem to be glad they are dead.
"We're one point ahead
Of those who are living,"
Is what they might have said
If they'd only forgotten . . .
They stood for a while in their shirts of white cotton,
Very silent and still in the drift of grey fog.
An army of tranquil ghosts
In a fog.
Then I watched each one of them coast
As still as a schooner at night,
I watched the whole throng of them coast
Away through the door to their home
Wherever their home may be.
Then the thought of the sea
Came in from the fog to me.
"The sea was made to drown in."
The words stirred deep in my flesh.
The voice rose as the song of the wind:
"Swim far out away from the beach
And the waves shall reach,
Shall reach for your lips
And drink from them deep in your breath;
For there is peace, peace in death."

But I did not wish to die just then,
For there came to the eye of my mind again
The face of a girl
White in the fog’s grey swirl.
And her body beneath it was white,
Her body was white and called for embraces
Hot, wet with passionate tears.
I had not seen that girl for years.
She had been lost in the memory that effaces,
In the dream that burns out itself.
I remembered a time:
We lay in a nest of sand.
In my hand I held her hand,
And for a long time had kept still,
Looking, looking in the clear of the moon,
Looking through our eyes at our eyes,
Till there were no thoughts and no will,
Till there was nothing between us,
Being one in all things but space. . . .
Then we spoilt the affair;
We mingled our bodies and our hearts fell apart.
Our dream: we could never redress it,
But we could never confess it;
For it had been a fine thing to think,
"With one mouth our two souls can drink,
And surely shall they die
On a single sigh."
It was false and doubtless wrong,
Wrong to think this thought;
In this life so is song . . .
I felt a kiss swift on my lips,
And then, with her, gone.
I had forgotten about the dawn,
I had forgotten all about myself,
And for a while that is a fine thing too.
But now it all comes back to me:
I am alone.
I am as solitary as a single stone
Uplifting a broken head in a lonely sea.
There is nothing at all for me to do
But sigh and drink in the dawn.
Save to myself I am unknown,
And shall live on ever unknown;
Live with no friends
Remembering things that could never have happened.

Sept. 16, 1921
THREE POEMS

I
The roll of my time,
Dust of my years,
Pale leaves, bright leaves,
Bloom of my growth,
The slow charred fragments,
Ash of lost dreams,
Dead hopes caught in the throat,
Gnashed now with tears;
And, above these things,
My honour’s oath.
In their sincerity
There sounds mine own eternal mood.
I place them in your hand.

O my Love, my Love, will you, will you understand?

June 14, 1922

II
Clio gave her call for truth
A matter of no mercy;
Clio hath a heavy lid
Shut ever, heavy ever, shut.
I shall caress the lash no more:
I spilled austerities, she gave no sign,
Clio hath sleep, still, stark, endures—
Give her the go by.

I, I worship graced girls to whom I have never spoken:
Voices in the void air sprung from deep throats,
Sprung from the soft gold with no more urge than song,
Song to give them birth
Song to solace passion
Song to clothe the bright corpse,
And while the sound moves there is no end of them at all.

May 13, 1922
III
Charm of the quick smile
Be in you, girl,
But remember how your song shall spring:—

Sorrow, sorrow, what new sorrow
Shall the morrow bring!

*June 17, 1922*
THREE POEMS

I
The spun funny eyes
of that girl

yawn

feeble windows
dive down darkly

And yet
Cobalt splash bolt
and the scorch prevails

Why
does she twist that shudder?

II
Thou art
arrowlike and brown.
Thou art a smile.
Slender!
it is the lips,—
close now, while perspiration
creeps with the waiting;

now closed—dim on the throat,
dart of coolness snake...

thou art dead,
there is no smile of thee here.

III
That I am of this mood:
Subdued

Slender now, the rush leaf
or the yellowed blade
(it is grass, or a fine saw toothed.)

I am soothed

and have sorrow—the grief
over memory,

and am being flayed
by the melody.
THREE POEMS
G. M. P. : VALE

I
I will raise thee no twilight effigy,
Brother, thou;
Since thy voice spoke deepening
through nine hours of my heart—
Flowers of death have hold on thee;

fingers struck down thy torn throat,
and there is, doubtless, a one peace
And your face

   the cool swirl of black waters,
tranquility of long blades—

I have of thee forever the smoothness of these,
   things to burn down mine eyes.

II
Dead, dead, and above all, dead:
Who is now dust in dust,
Silent—thou;
And the softness of words, stilled.

Turned again to old sound,
To renew the older intrusion,
The now lost achievement—
The high face and many murmured words
Build up again forgotten volume:

Quiet, quiet, That is a beautiful book . . .
To take, now and then,
The shadow of tombs for sleep . . .

From the cavern of your eath
Spills out heaviness of void depths,—
From the voice no rest.
I had never known you on that day
And I shall ever be bewildered
By your mind’s smooth thud—
Utterly.

III
The coffined mauve repose, immobile;
And altered, wrought remote, the face I feel;
Now naked, of hard rock, and swept by high
Salt winds—while all softnesses congeal.

Sternness now drowns down the gentle smile,
And drives hardly through my night its pile—
The horror of dead beauty, the ghost’s first cry,
After the joltings of his day defile.

But it is ever, and forever, l’homme qui rit;
In the softness of his laughter that his plea
Grows so subtly stronger in my mind—
And his ivory smile, the melody.

By such small movements I remember him,
And overhear how frailly now the dim
Contralto of his voice displays the kind
Decoration of his fancy’s whim.
THUS THINGS PROCEED . . .

I
Conferred, by her of the mangy face,
—had heard Professor Copeland lecture
(the cynosure appeared a grimace)
—knew, yes, knew the pristine Royce;
conferred the obfuscated intellect.
"Do you," she said,
"do you never observe
the progress of the age?"
I was polite and looked out the window,
there was a bicycle
beneath a boy,
and the hind wheel was bound with tape,
and as it whirled
a pin wheel came to light
proving her truth.

She reads, for her monthly, The Bookman,
but prefers the Catholic Review
because the ten commandments
produce all the really worth while books.

June 22, 1922

II
She was, as it were, a young lady of nineteen
who slept with herself too often.
She has nine dirty stories on tap
and she shaves the hair from her under arm
once a month.

She is a doctor's whelp.

She said, quite fiercely,
that there was no God and no soul,
but when I asked her why she thought so
she appeared puzzled.
For literary approbation,
'I think Conrad commonplace;
Simon Called Peter is a good book.'

She was not, she said, a flapper.

III

Here is a Herrin'choker
now at Harvard;
he frequents the more
Bohemian parts of Boston,
where, as at Young's,
one may smoke and look pretty.
When he walks he waves his buttocks—
which last are very large.

He has a Hudson super-six
and often gives a prostitute a ride—
but nothing else:
he is afraid of disease, he says,
but likes synthetic gin
and Mademoiselle de Maupin.

IV

As occupation (financial assets are required)
Mr Edward Pike would blandly inform one,
'I am busy from 9 to 12
but—really I'm most fortunate!—
the rest of the day is my own.
He has connections—with P. Hale and H.T.P.;
and has, to be exact, twice, reviewed concerts—
without, of course, remuneration.
I also learned,
That Laurence Hope is truly sublime
in passion;
That, He went hopping back to Nature
once a year,
but that he couldn’t stand it long
because Nature has no music
and music is the breath of his soul; That, He wrote, but not

for publication, though he had once considered

a Symposium with some chaps like himself in all star collaboration. And, finally, in a carefully profound voice: 'I possess

a middle class conscience.'

V

Before a boot black parlor window was an oldish chap in dark clothes and a grey felt hat: 'gentilhomme Américain.' He was looking, with a little smile on his face and his hands in his trousers' pockets twitching,

looking, I perceived, at the smooth legs of two girls on the raised chairs within. As I turned away he passed his tongue between his lips.
TWO POEMS

I
On account of fate restricted
To the peculiar position
Of ever perceiving the truth
As a sound doubtfully inflicted
Upon his bewildered audition
By a cloud of circumstance,
He is never in complete concordance
With the symphonic wail
In an ascending scale
Heard among the erudite,
The ethically unperturbed,
Of our exalted community.
Not having the opportunity
Of beholding culture's light
He is frequently disturbed
By the positive rendition
Of his neighbor's advice
On the vital question of vice;
An he therefor avoids submission,
Preferring the doctrine of chance
To that of virtue's advance.
Since his own thoughts falter
He supposes all things alter.

Mar. 29, 1922

II
Upon the pavement in a foggy night
I hear the fall of hidden feet
And see the dim features
Peer, as ghosts
In a dream;
And the steam
Of their breath boasts
That they are human creatures,
Else I should surely think them fleet
Phantoms of the misty city lights.

April 15, 1922
TWO PORTRAITS
I
OF THE ARTIST
Alone, the calm face seldom stirs;
The eyes, charred deep of sorrow,
Steady, scarring—his gaze prefers
To seek for Beauty,
Her clear contralto,
Rather than the truth
Of a particular manifesto.
His slightly twisted lips have spoken,
Believing in the "Prose tradition in verse,"
Never in the ultimate "good of progress,"
Or love, the core of the universe;
Thinking patience worse
Than suicidal egress
From the heavy ordered storm
Ordained by virtue's heaven.
The nostrils eager, blown,
Sniffing ever for the wine
Of the marine expanse;
His mind a microphone
For the faint unheard tone:
He strove merely not to fail;
Sincere amid the botched wail,
His voice a vibrant violin
Of sorrow choked with laughter.
He avoided the glitter
Of the intentionally sotten;
At the last bitter,
He died... forgotten.
II
OF AN OLD MAN
My friend is very old,
And his age seems to have accorded him no privileges,
But rather has imposed new burdens upon him,
And ever new burdens pile up about him.
To me these burdens are phantoms
That could be forgotten with only a slight effort;
But my friend is very old, much older than I,
And his body is frail, far frailer than mine,
So little things weigh heavily upon him—
Things that I would banish with a flick of my fingernail
Push his burnt out eyes further back in their sockets.
Four years ago,
When my friend was much younger than he is now,
His son was killed,
His head blown off in the second battle of the Marne.
My friend is very glad that this event occurred,
For now his son cannot perturb his reflections
Or offend the least particle of his isolation. . .
My friend’s head resembles a loose hung skull
Filled with the cavities of his past emotions.
When he is not feeling within himself
He assumes an air of detached interest
Congruous to a half animated corpse;
For my friend is very old
And is concerned with the perception of approaching
darkness,
With the old gold and faint scarlet of his memory
Rehabilitating the obscure events of his youth.
But his dreams have grown cold,
For he has become hypercritical,
And the seas of his illusion have lost their profundity
And mirror now but their own falsity. . .
In the evening he denies the beauty
Of the violent winter sunsets:—
He says the colours
Are not correctly superimposed
And that the spaces are wrong.
Yes; my friend is very old,
And when I told him about it
He laughed derisively,
For he was afraid to cry.
b MS Am 1880 (60)

POEM

When it is evening
against blue-bellied clouds
a quiet wavering
of cobalt gloom,

desolate this place
sheerly is waste
of softnesses
against the tumbling world.

Music the ghost of sound
utters her fragile clarity.

I overhear
her deep hilarity
through all my room.
WHILE SORROW SINGS

While sorrow sings
The dawn drifts down the sky
And utters sudden tender rings
Of subtle light like an angel's breath, a sigh;
The perfume of unearthly things
Sharp as a space-born cry,
When sorrow springs
From night to drown the day;
A shudder of despair it brings,
And shrivels life and shadows hope away:—
While sorrow sings
Of fair inhuman things.

Feb 9, 1922
Coda
AN AD LIB VERSION OF LA MORT DES ARTISTES

Suppose we make an English paraphrase of the whole poem around the second quatrain: We will use up our very souls in confused dark plots, we will break up a vast amount of framework piece by piece, before we get to contemplate that great Creation for which we have so hellish a desire that it chokes our throats; yes, we exhaust ourselves arrow by arrow and the quiver is empty. We are no better than those sculptors who have never envisaged what they want to create, who, damned and stigmatised by that effrontery, go beating their chests and heads with their tools,—those sculptors who have only a hope, a strange dark Citadel of hope, and that hope is that death soaring like a new and rising sun, may yet bring to bloom the flowers of their brains. We are as bad as all that, and our hope can be only theirs. I am indeed the sad caricature of myself, my own jingling fool. But with such a target, to lose all I have, and the target death. (Cf. "The unseen seat of life, the sentient target of death."—Bronte)—It seems to me that if after this paraphrase we put the poem back in Baudelaire’s order we come out clear enough for all our poetic needs. We need only a necessary clue to remember the terrible privation of the artist, or any other, who finds out he cannot see what it is he exhausts himself on; or, if you like, we need only to remember that it was both in despair and aspiration that the great churches aimed their flèches at the heart of God and that the artist of our time likes to think that if he does all this by himself, and especially the Baudelairean artist desperately rejoices to think so. Finally, even the worst human being believes, in his very worstness, that he will be somehow vindicated in death. That is what death is for. But at that point the artist, unlike the other animals, likes to be in company, so it is his hope, that with ces sculpteurs around him,

     que la mort, planant comme un soleil nouveau,
     Fera s’épanouir les fleurs de leur cerveau!

It is not for nothing that we have the phrase, La gloire, c’est le soleil des mortels! Glory is the light we see by; Death is a kind of glory, at least to those who have not otherwise enough of it; and in the sun of death will our own flowers spring to bloom. This is the flower of self-ecstasy: the exulting and exalting self in its necessary despair: the flower of absolute creation.
Apparatus Criticus

When sections of a poem are ordered differently in their periodical appearance, publication information is followed by an apparatus of the section numbers and/or titles: the name and number of the section in book publication is taken as a lemma and appears first in bold, followed by a square bracket, followed by the section's number in the periodical appearance. These corresponding sets of section numbers are arranged according to the ordering of sections in their periodical publication. I then record variants in wording and punctuation below variants in arrangement, referring to section numbers as they appear in the books of poems. Variants from the recording for the Yale Series of Recorded Poets have been recorded as Blackmur reads them on the disc.

For Any Book

FROM JORDAN'S DELIGHT

From Jordan's Delight
The Southern Review. 2:4 (Spring 1937) 749-760.
R. P. Blackmur Reads from his Own Works. The Yale Series of Recorded Poets.


Of Lucifer
I 6 whipping post] whipping-post 11 out-pride] outpride 13 over-weened]
overweened II 2 water,] waters 13 light;] light— 14 —and] and III 13-14 [not
indented in P] 13 Thine,] —Thine 14 vainhopes] vain hopes [Princeton gives
"vain hopes".] IV 3 for] as 14 alone shall be] shall be alone

An Elegy for Five

[P gives stanzas 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 indented and in italics.]

themselves,] themselves 48 intent.] abstract, intent. 49 Believe,] Believe 50
odours] odors 56 eyes] eyes, 57 mine] mine,

For Horace Hall
The American Mercury. 32:125 (May 1934) 102-103.

I 12 stand] parade II 10 textbooks] text-books III 8 true] True 9 way;] way:

Sea Island Miscellany
Hound & Horn. 6:2 (Jan.-March 1933) 234-241.
14 of the 16 sections (numbered I-XIII; two sections form parts 1 and 2 of the last
section):

I 1 sea island] sea-island II 9 salt sea-mortifiled] salt-sea-mortified 10 hide] hide,
IV 7 and the han] the han* footnote] *Han is a term for heron, common on the
coast of Maine. V 3 and across] across VI 1 sea-spray] sea spray 2 breathe,]
breathe; 4] there is soft-falling underneath. 12 stare] ride VII 2 Amen,] Amen; 7
God,] God; VIII 13 morning's] morning IX 10 edge] rim X 8-9 [HH gives stanza
break] 11 this] the 12 seaweed] rock-weed XI 5 There] (There 6 dark.] dark) 7
will,] will think,] think 9 mailman] mail-man XIII 1] Wind wás not. Flát was, bút
was imminent. 3 spar-buoy] spar buoy 11 mountain night] mountain-night XIV 5
Sea answer] Sea-answer 15 drown] drown. XV 5 Sea answer] Sea-answer XVI 1
night-storm] night-storm, 2 sea.} sea; 3 Hidden] hidden
Judas Priest
2 of the 4 sections:
II] I III] II

II 4 pact:] pact. 5 we] We 6 forced:] forced 7 glued:] glued; 13 —Yet] Yet
III 6 waste] waste, terror] terror, 10 tormented:] tormented 11 heart,] heart

Views of Boston Common and Near By
title Near By] Nearby 4 breadline] bread-line

Witness of Light
The Southern Review. 1:1 (July 1935) 87-8.

October Frost
29 Transfixed on the bright] Fixed on my moon’s white 30 frost] rush

Steriles Ritournelles
3 hat,] hat. 7 —How] How 12 broken—gone] broken, gone 17 may be,] maybe,

Petit Manan Point
Three Songs at Equinox
*Virginia Quarterly Review.* 12:1 (Jan. 1936) 56.

1 7-8 [VQR gives stanza break] III 3 thistles] thistle 5-6] until, in the late light and wild sea-cold [one line replaces two]

Phasellus Ille
*The Magazine: A Journal of Contemporary Writing.* 1:3 (February 1934) 71.

2 pinnance] pinnace 6 leak;] leak, 14 is] is

Scarabs for the Living
8 of the 24 sections, as "Eight Poems":

XII alone, among "Two Pages of Poems". No variants.

10 of the 24 sections:

III 5 Meanwhile] Meanwhile, tM. VII 4 loss] there tM. VIII 1 rediscovered,] rediscovered tM. XXI 5 nonetheless] none the less, P. XXIII 1 encroachment,] encroachment P.

Since There's No Help . . .

*title Help . . .] Help 13-14 [not indented in tM.*

Pone Metum . . .
title Metum . . . } Metum 5 fear] fear,

Dedications

A Labyrinth of Being
Hound & Horn. 2:2 (Winter 1929) 140-142.
I, as the first section of "Effigy". "Effigy" appears in Uncollected Poems.

II, as "Funeral Business". Appears with "Steriles Ritournelles" as "Two Poems".

5 of the 13 sections; not numbered but titled:

Smoke. 3:1 (Winter 1934) 12.
XII, as "Indubitable Venus", alone.

XIII, as "By Luckless Blood", alone.

A Funeral for a Few Sticks: Three Fragments from an Early Poem. 1925
larus: The Celestial Visitor. 1:2 (March 1927) 3-14.
The "Three Fragments" in FJD are 3 of 10 sections in larus:
The entire poem as published in larus appears in Uncollected Poems.

"What worm of truth crawled in
That flexible red limb,
The brain's most monstrous twin,
When our black hearts imagined him
Dissolving all flesh within
The corrupt vim
Of his red, meat-raw skin.

"See where he lurches by, yet never passes!"
—Silent he bent to tend the dying fire.

How shall I prosper? Shall I slay my god?—
Blot him from being with a ruined smile?
What does he burn but rubbish, what incant
But rituals of terror, vanity
And wasted years?
Eternal tokens
And yet he is my own eternal voice,
The order of the chaos which I am

THE SECOND WORLD

The Second World
As "World Aback", in Twentieth Century Verse. 12-13 (Oct. 1937) 96.

Una Vita Nuova
Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature. 2:3 (Spring 1942) 154-155.
Rats, Lice, and History: An Image of the United States Senate
_The Nation._ 152:19 (10 May 1941) 559.

20 smells] smells,

Before Sentence is Passed

I 2 Honour] Honor 21 Wait:] Wait. 24 know whether,] even know, 25] I do not consider my time wasted if you look, 34-35 [Princeton gives no stanza break between these lines, which fall on a page break in SW. There is a break between the lines in KR.] 42 noticed:] noticed. see] see: II 9 ask,] ask 10 boredom),—] boredom), 34 federate] internecine 61 only what] what only 65 cloaca,] cloaca. 66 in] In III 25 Honor.] Honour.

THE GOOD EUROPEAN

Twelve Scarabs For The Living: 1942

II 3 plead] plea IV 2 betrayed,] betrayed V 2 your staff] staff VII 6 use.] use IX title o'] 0' X 5 that] than

Three Poems from a Text: Isaiah LXI: 1-3
_Partisan Review._ 11:3 (Summer 1944) 284-287.

I 26 myself] my self III 43 rôle] role

Thirteen Scarabs for the Living: 1945
Sections I-XII (in order).

III 2 cart,] cart— X 3 mine,] mine: XII 4 [Princeton gives "dead most dead".] XIII 5 [Princeton gives "faithful fellow".]
The Good European: 1945
*The Sewanee Review.* 54:3 (Summer 1946) 504-510.


Sunt Lacrimæ Rerum et Mentem Mortalia Tangunt
*Partisan Review.* 12:2 (Spring 1945) 177.

title Lacrimæ] Lacrimae  Mentem] Mentum

Boy and Man: The Cracking Glass

title Boy and Man:] Man and Boy: 8 heart; it] heart. It 12 pride. Create] pride; create 14 life] life, truth] truth,

The Rape of Europa
*Partisan Review.* 14:2 (March-April 1947) 149.

15 out of] of 17 burn] burn, 20-21 [PR gives a stanza break]

Ithyphallics
*R. P. Blackmur Reads from his Own Works. The Yale Series of Recorded Poets.*

10 its] is

The Communiqués from Yalta
*Partisan Review.* 12:2 (Spring 1945) 177-8.
title Communiqués] Communiques 1 soul,] soul postscript [not in PR]

UNCOLLECTED POEMS

Alma Venus

Last Things

A Funeral For A Few Sticks
_ilarus: The Celestial Visitor._ 1:2 (March 1927) 3-14.
Not in Princeton.

Effigy
_Hound & Horn._ 2:2 (Winter 1929) 140-142.

Water-Ruined
_Pagany: A Native Quarterly._ 1:2 (Spring 1930) 99.

Flower and Weed
_Pagany: A Native Quarterly._ 1:2 (Spring 1930) 99-100.

Of a Muchness
_Pagany: A Native Quarterly._ 1:2 (Spring 1930) 100.

A Monument Among the Winds
Not in Princeton.

Ides of March to April Fool's

Night Piece
Less Love Than Eachness
*Hound & Horn*. 5:3 (April-June 1932) 421.

Resurrection

The Bull

By Definition

On Excited Knees
*Twentieth Century Verse*. 12-13 (Oct. 1937) 96.

All's the Foul Fiend's

Nigger Jim

And no Amends

Mr. Virtue and the Three Bears
*Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. 79:3 (December 1951) 144-145. [text]
*R. P. Blackmur Reads from his Own Works. Yale Series of Recorded Poets*. [variants]

**epigraph** *hammer out*] hammer our  *in Lucerne*] outside Lucerne  *fifteen years*] years ago  **13-17** [stanza 4 in Y.]  **18-23** [stanza 3 in Y.]

Threnos
[Princeton has "theme" for "threne", and gives the last stanza of of "All Sirens' Seine" as a conclusion for the poem.]
FROM LETTERS TO GEORGE

b MS Am 1880 (3) BALZAC: SCULPTURE
Rejected by The Dial.

b MS Am 1880 (4) I-IV
I: titled "Dead Whore" in notebook C0227_Bx11_f1(88). Rejected by The Dial.
II: titled "The Audience: Laughter" in notebook C0227_Bx11_f1(86). Rejected by The Dial.
III: titled "Velocity" in notebook C0227_Bx11_f1(84). Rejected by The Dial.
IV: titled "Heritage" in notebook C0227_Bx11_f1(82). Rejected by The Dial, The Nation.

b MS Am 1880 (7) A Dream.
Rejected by The Dial, The Atlantic, Smart Set.
RPB notes to himself: "the first four lines are not so bad."

b MS Am 1880 (8) Education
Rejected by The Dial

b MS Am 1880 (9) Effigy
Identical to section iv of "Effigy" in Uncollected Poems.

b MS Am 1880 (11) The Eternal prayer
Parts I and II rejected by The Dial

b MS Am 1880 (12) EXACERBATIONS
Early version of b MS Am 1880 (13) EXACERBATIONS; variants follow:

Taking breath.
"My genius is no more than a girl."
That frequentation is seldom Mr Pound;
O Mr Pound remember this,


II. 1 tray[,] tray 8 dreams] dreams … 9 for] For 13 lips[,] lips 14 scorn[,] scorn 15 years …] years. 16 [indented 1x] Korin:] Korin. 17-28 [not in v1] 29 no greater] greater 30 [not in v1] 31 [aligned left] 35-36] I don’t, for I have lived with them a long while. 43 slaughter:] slaughter, 44 Slaughter;] Slaughter, 47 excrement:] excrement, 48 body;] body 49 belly] belly, 51 unconsolated] unconsolated 52 For then] Then

b MS Am 1880 (17) GODS
Rejected by The Dial.

b MS Am 1880 (25) The Land that Men have Lost
Rejected by The Dial.

b MS Am 1880 (28) Effigy
"This is, at any rate, a sincere tribute to Swinburne--to the intoxication I had of him."

b MS Am 1880 (32) OF MERCIES
Rejected by The Dial.

b MS Am 1880 (34) Parfum Exquise de la Mort
Rejected by The Dial.

b MS Am 1880 (37) THE PORTRAIT OF AN OLD MAN
Rejected by The Dial, The Double Dealer.

b MS Am 1880 (42) A Song.
Rejected by The Dial, The Atlantic, Smart Set.

b MS Am 1880 (43) POEM "Take it up then—this book or that;"
Early version of "For Any Book"; variants follow:

another husk or ghost,
another void, some other’s passion
This rite is empty— The skin of a slain god shrink — It is eternal lamentation and warning your 

It is this page, this slice of printed matter:

a pledge to ruin
irrevocable fear articulate

old,] old murderous,] murderous names—] names dead: 18 dead.} dead: 19-20]
names 16 names—] names 18 dead.} dead: 19-20]
[no stanza break] Corpses floating in the half-light

inattentive and straight,
the still horror of the nations' night.

there they rest, their history, fictive and insolent,
whose minds were hungry, thirst-driven to all ends
of the earth;
driven, driven beyond death, cracking stones for
sustenance.

b MS Am 1880 (49) POEM ["There are no words like the smalll"]
Number CLXXXV in notebook C0227_Bx11_f2

b MS Am 1880 (52) THOUGHTS DURING A WET DAWN
Rejected by The Dial.

b MS Am 1880 (55) G. M. P. VALE
George Anthony Palmer: "George Munroe Palmer died 23 July 1922. These
poems were given me the day of the funeral."

b MS Am 1880 (56) THUS THINGS PROCEED . . .
I: titled "Une de mes amies" in notebook C0227_Bx11_f1
Rejected by The Double Dealer.

b MS Am 1880 (57) TWO MATTERS OF FACT AND A PRAYER
Incomplete; contains uncancelled variants.

b MS Am 1880 (58) TWO POEMS
Titled "Melody of Doubt" in notebook C0227_Bx11_f1
b MS Am 1880 (61) WHILE SORROW SINGS
Rejected by *The Dial*.

**AN AD LIB VERSION OF LA MORT DES ARTISTES**
"Notes on First Seminar on Criticism", Appendix viii. RF 1.2 series 200R. Box 407 folder 3511. Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, NY.
During the course of my research, I came across several items that were not included in any of the previous bibliographies (Carlos Baker, "R. P. Blackmur: A Checklist", 1942; Gerald J. Pannick, "R. P. Blackmur: A Bibliography", 1974; Allen Tate, "Richard P. Blackmur, 1904-", 1954). This is therefore the most complete bibliography of publications by and about R. P. Blackmur that has so far been compiled. I have included some descriptive notes with the entries: bibliographical descriptions and colophons appear in small type, indented. Additional information about particular items, when speculative or contextual, appears in small type, in square brackets, and indented twice.

I. WORKS BY BLACKMUR
   i. Pamphlets and books
   ii. Recordings
   iii. Musical setting
   iv. In periodicals
   v. Archival material

II. ABOUT BLACKMUR
   i. Bibliography
   ii. Books and monographs
   iii. Reviews and essays
   iv. In other books
   v. Fiction and poems

III. FURTHER READING
Works by Blackmur

Pamphlets and books


Pamphlet of 4 leaves; a single poem. 1.5x3.5" woodcut by Waldo Murray of a nude woman facing a crowd near the sea, printed above the first line of verse.

[It is possible that the pamphlet was printed at Maurice Firuski’s Dunster House Press. In 1923 and 1924, Blackmur and Wallace Dickson were in negotiations with Firuski to secure loans for Dickson & Blackmur Used Books (RPB later became Firuski’s secretary when the business failed). In 1923, Waldo Murray designed a woodcut (a large scarab) for the cover of “A Most Unholy Trade”, a collection of Henry James’ letters on drama. It was claimed by no editor, published by the Scarab Press, and printed at Dunster House.]

Copy examined:
Inscribed to John Marsall and signed by R. P. Blackmur on 4 Dec 1924. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.


[Gordon Fraser was a student of F. R. Leavis; Leavis’ Mass Civilization and Minority Culture was the first of the six pamphlets he published, and perhaps gives the press its name: “In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment. They are still a small minority, though a larger one, who are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgment by genuine personal response. ….. The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Hardy (to take major instances) but of recognising their latest successors constitute the consciousness of the race (or of a branch of it) at a given time. For such capacity does not belong merely to an isolated aesthetic realm: it implies responsiveness to theory as well as to art, to science and philosophy in so far as these may affect the sense of the human situation and of the nature of life. Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition.”]

Psyche in the South. Tryon, North Carolina: Tryon Pamphlets, 1934.
[Tryon pamphlet series also included: *Happy Farmers*, John Crowe Ransom; *Before Disaster*, Yvor Winters (both 1934). The only later publication appears to be a souvenir movie programme for *Gone With the Wind* (1940).]


**From Jordan’s Delight.** New York: Arrow Editions, 1937.

**Dust jacket, front interior flap:**
Price $2.00

**FROM JORDAN’S DELIGHT**
by R. P. Blackmur

This is the first collection of the poems of a man who has already been acclaimed one of the most important American critics. Many of the poems derive their strength and character from the impact of a highly sensitized contemporary mind and one of the oldest poetic themes—the sea. All of them are testaments of a distinguished lyric talent.

**Published by**
ARROW EDITIONS

**Review slip:** "Review Copy Publication Date Feb 20 1937"

**Rear colophon:**
[.5x1.5" printer’s mark of a saint holding two printers’ inking balls]

From Jordan's Delight by R. P. Blackmur has been set and printed in Monotype Perpetua 14 point by Walter L. Goodwin Jr. & Bruce Gentry at The Rydal Press of Santa Fe New Mexico for Arrow Editions 1937

[Goodwin imported the fonts of matrices for Perpetua, and said in a 1938 interview that The Rydal Press was the only American press using the face for machine composition. The little saint device was designed by Warren Chappell.]

**Copy examined:**
1. Review copy with review slip
2. Flyleaf inscribed by Isolde Therese Gilbert at top right, with bookseller's label bottom left: ("THE GROLIER BOOKSHOP | 6 Plympton St., Cambridge ") Compiler's copy.

[Isolde Therese Gilbert was also known as Tessa Gilbert (later Horton), and was Blackmur’s first love. RPB’s biographer Russell Fraser gives much on Tessa but does not mention the name Isolde. Notice of Tessa’s marriage to Philip C. Horton, Hart Crane’s first biographer, in the Princeton Alumni Weekly (28 April 1937): "Mrs. Isolde Gilbert MacKay to Philip C. Horton at Cambridge, Mass". Fraser mentions Henry F. Gilbert, Tessa’s father; his papers at Yale include recorded interviews and notes from "his daughter, Isolde Gilbert Horton". For more on Tessa and RPB, see note below for *The Good European*. See also Fraser’s *A Mingled Yarn* (HB) 1981) and *Letters of Delmore Schwartz*, (Ontario Review Press, 1984) e.g., Delmore to RPB suggesting a Henry James masquerade ball: "Perhaps we could get Philip Horton to play Merton Densher, Gertrude [Buckman] would be here as what Maisie knew, John
Berryman could come as Roderick Hudson, Harry Levin as Gilbert Osmond, Helen [Dickson] as the actress in The Tragic Muse, Edmund Wilson as Henrietta Stackpole, Eileen Berryman as Milly Theale simply because she has beautiful red hair, Tessa could be the spoils of Poynton, I would be present as Edith Wharton, and you could come as R. P. Blackmur."


**Dust jacket:** White and green with illustration of grass leaves. Designed by Helen Dickson, Blackmur's wife.


**Dust jacket, front interior flap:**

Price $2.50

In THE SECOND WORLD, R. P. Blackmur combines poetic insight with critical analysis to establish a new and penetrating point of view for the observing man of today. Neither meekly renouncing hope, nor admitting defeat, this writing is profoundly disturbing in the best sense.

The Cummington Press
Cummington, Massachusetts

**Rear colophon:**

*This first edition of The Second World has been hand-set by Katharine Frazier in Centaur and Arrighi types, and hand-printed on dampened Sterling Laid paper by Harry Duncan and David Newton. The device on the title-page was drawn by Eugene Canade from the breast-plate of judgment as worn by the Irish Druids. Of three-hundred copies this is [number written in ink] [75" circle with device of a printing press, in blue ink.]*

**Copies examined:**

1. "34". Compiler's copy.


Issued without a dust jacket.

**Front matter:** three versions.

periodicals: Partisan Review, The Sewanee Review, Chimera, & The Kenyon Review, to which acknowledgments are due for kind permission to reprint here.


Rear colophon:
Erratum: On page 13, in the last verse, for «yaur» read the word «your».

Of this book, three hundred ten copies have been printed, those numbered I to XL and signed by the author being on Arches paper from France, and those 1 to 270 on Etruria paper from Italy. The type is Victor Hammer's American Uncial; the binding is by Arno Werner. H.D. & W. W. finx. & fec. This copy is . . . . [number written in ink above the final punctuation]

[Victor Hammer fled Vienna for the United States in 1939. Arno Werner fled Germany in 1939, later becoming chief bookbinder for rare editions at Houghton Library. Another edition of 3 copies not mentioned in this note was printed on Arches paper, bound in white pigskin, and signed by RPB and Arno Werner.]

Copies examined:
2. "22". Etruria paper. Front matter version (2). Text of the poems identical to "1". University of Buffalo.

["Tessie" is almost certainly Tessa Gilbert Horton, Blackmur's first love: some early manuscript poems held at Princeton are inscribed "To Tessie, written out expressly for her favor", and date from the years of their romance. Tessa married Philip Horton (Hart Crane's first biographer) in 1937. He became the first station chief in Paris of the Central Intelligence Agency, an outgrowth of the O.S.S., during the year The Good European was published.]


[Donoghue reports that this edition was "possibly edited by Joseph Frank or one of his students."]


**Recordings**


The Second World; Ithyphallics; Una Vita Nuova; October Frost; Petit Manan Point; From Jordan’s Delight; Missa Vocis; Elegy for Five; Three Poems from a Text; Miching Mallecho; Sunt Lacrimae Rerum; Judas Priest; All’s the Foul Fiend’s; Mr. Virtue and the Three Bears; Threnos.

Musical Setting

John Eaton’s cycle Songs for R.P.B. : Roma 1965 sets poems by Hart Crane and a poem by Blackmur. ("Repose of Rivers", Crane; "Mirage", Blackmur; "The Return", Crane). For soprano, 2 pianos, and Syn-Ket (sound synthesizer developed by Eaton and Paul Ketoff, beginning 1959). The composition was the first concert work ever to incorporate live performance on an electronic sound synthesizer. First performed at the Villa Aurelia of the American Academy in Rome by Miciko Hirayama (soprano), Jane Schoonover Smith and John Eaton (piano), and Paul Ketoff and Otto Luening (Syn-Ket).

See also:

In Periodicals

Titles of poems are in bold. Abbreviations following the entries refer to the books in which poems or essays are collected.

1925


[RPB first claimed this review when Carlos Baker was compiling his checklist in 1942. Upon examination, several of the other unsigned reviews on the same page bear the mark of Blackmur’s distinctive prose style. It is possible that RPB wished to conceal the attribution of these, as one of the reviews is the following of John Crowe Ransom’s Chills and Fever: "Unrewarding dissonances, mountebank persiflage, mock medieval minstrelsy, and shreds of elegance disturbingly suggestive of now this, now that contemporary bard, deprive one of the faculty to diagnose this "dangerous" phenomenon to which one has exposed oneself." Other reviews possibly by RPB: Poems, Lady Margaret Sackville; A Fair Land, Martha Ostenso.]


1926


1927


"Hubris". Review of The Lion and the Fox, Wyndham Lewis. The Hound & Horn. 1:1 (Sept. 1927) 42-47.


1928


"The Enemy". Review of Time and Western Man, Wyndham Lewis. Hound & Horn. 1:3 (Spring 1928) 270-273.


"Politikon: The Young Man at a Loss". *Hound & Horn*. 2:1 (Fall 1928) 49-60.

1929


1930


**Three Poems. Pagany: A Native Quarterly.** 1:2 (Spring 1930) 99-100.

"Water-ruined"
"Flower and Weed"
"Of a Muchness"


"Erik Satie—Three Men in a Tub". Review of Gymnopédie No. 1 (orchestrated by Debussy), played by Sevitzky; Trois Pièces Montées, played by a symphony orchestra conducted by Pierro Chagnon; Je te veux—Valse Lente, played by Jean Wiener. Music Lovers' Phonograph Monthly Review. 4:10 (July 1930) 351.


"In the Godly Modes: An appreciation of the Solesmes Gregorian Chant Recordings". The Phonograph Monthly Review. 5:2 (Nov. 1930) 45.

**1931**


"Steriles Ritournelles". FJD.

"Funeral Business". FJD ("A Labyrinth of Being" section II).


**1932**

"Examples of Wallace Stevens". *Hound & Horn*. 5:2 (Jan.-March 1932) 223-255. DA, LG.


"Less Love Than Eachness". *Hound & Horn*. 5:3 (April-June 1932) 421.


1933

"Sea Island Miscellany". *Hound & Horn*. 6:2 (Jan.-March 1933) 234-241. FJD.


1934


"Masks of Ezra Pound". *Hound & Horn*. 7:2 (Jan.-March 1934) 177-212. DA, LG.


**Eight Poems. The Magazine: A Journal of Contemporary Writing.** 1:2 (January 1934) 52-53. FJD (8 sections of "Scarabs for the Living").


"For Horace Hall". *The American Mercury*. 32:125 (May 1934) 102-103. FJD.


1935


"D. H. Lawrence as a Poet". Direction. 1:2 (Jan-March 1935) 79-89. DA, LG ("D. H. Lawrence and Expressive Form").


"Since There’s No Help". The Magazine: A Journal of Contemporary Writing. 2:5 (March-April 1935) 216. FJD.


"New Thresholds, New Anatomies: Notes on a Text by Hart Crane". Direction. 1:3 (April-June 1935) 123-134. DA, LG.


"Witness of Light". The Southern Review. 1:1 (July 1935) 87-8. FJD.

"October Frost". Anathema: An Unorthodox Quarterly. 1:2 (July-Sept. 1935) 5. FJD.

"Pone Metum". The New Republic. 84:1080 (14 Aug.1935) 15. FJD.


1936

"Three Songs at Equinox". Virginia Quarterly Review. 12:1 (Jan. 1936) 56. FJD.


"Notes on the Novel—1936". Review of The Son of Marietta, Johan Fabricius; The Jew of Rome, Lion Feuchtwanger; The Stars Look Down, A. J. Cronin; The Sound Wagon, T. S. Stribling; It Can’t Happen Here, Sinclair Lewis; The World With a Fence, Marian Sims; After a Hundred Years, Ruth Eleanor McKee; The Hurricane, Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall; Banjo on my Knee, Harry Hamilton; Green Hills of Africa, Ernest Hemingway; Perish in their Pride, Henry de Motherlant; Stoker Bush, James Hanley; Mr. Aristotle, Ignazio Silone; Butcher Bird, Reuben Davis; Innocent Summer, Frances Frost; Men and Brethren, James Gould Cozzens; King Coffin, Conrad Aiken; From Death to Morning, Thomas Wolfe; Flamethrowers, Gordon Friesen; The Foxes, R. P. Harriss; The Root and the Flower, L. H. Myers; The Last Puritan, George Santayana. Southern Review. 1:4 (Spring 1936) 888-903. EG.

[The essay was probably solicited by John McAlpin Berryman (as his name appears in this number of The Columbia Review) not the editor of this issue, but here announced as winner of the Boar's Head poetry award and head of the Boar's Head Committee. See "Olympus", Love & Fame 18-19 for Berryman on RPB during this period:

When he answered by hand from Boston my nervous invitation to come and be honored at our annual Poetry Reading, it must have been ten minutes before I could open the envelope. I got him to review Tate's book of essays & Mark to review The Double Agent. Olympus!

RPB's review follows Mark Van Doren's review of The Double Agent.]


"The Expense of Greatness: Three Emphases on Henry Adams". Virginia Quarterly Review. 12:3 (Summer 1936) 396-415. EG, LH.


"The Later Poetry of W. B. Yeats". Southern Review. 2:2 (Fall 1936) 339-362. EG, LG.


**1937**


"From Jordan's Delight". *The Southern Review*. 2:4 (Spring 1937) 749-760. FJD.

"Letters of Marian Adams". *Virginia Quarterly Review*. 13:2 (Spring 1937) 289-295. EG.


"Emily Dickinson: Notes on Prejudice and Fact". *Southern Review*. 3:2 (Fall 1937) 323-347. EG, LG.


"World Aback". *Twentieth Century Verse*. 12-13 (Oct. 1937) 96. SW ("The Second World").


1938

"The Later Poetry of W. B. Yeats". Purpose. Special Verse Number, 10:1 (Jan-March 1938) 5-20. "Shortened a little" by the editors. EG.


"The Craft of Herman Melville: A Putative Statement". Virginia Quarterly Review. 14:2 (Spring 1938) 266-282. EG, LH.

"In Our Ends Are Our Beginnings". Virginia Quarterly Review. 14:2 (Summer 1938) 446-450.


1939


"Henry and Brooks Adams: Parallels to Two Generations". Southern Review. 5:2 (Fall 1939) 308-334.

"The Situation in American Writing". Answers to seven questions. Partisan Review. 6:5 (Fall 1939) 117-119.

1940

"Henry Adams: Three Late Moments". Kenyon Review. 2:1 (Winter 1940) 7-29. PI.


"Shorter Poems of Thomas Hardy". Southern Review. 6:1 (Summer 1940) 20-48. EG, FV, LG.

"A Note on Yvor Winters". Poetry: A Magazine of Verse. 57:2 (November 1940) 144-152. EG.

1941


"Before Sentence is Passed". *Kenyon Review*. 3:1 (Winter, 1941) 63-38. SW.

"Chaos is Come Again". *Southern Review*. 6:4 (Spring 1941) 658-674.

"Rats, Lice, and Histoy: An Image of the United States Senate". *The Nation*. 152:19 (10 May 1941) 559. SW.


"Humanism and Symbolic Imagination: Notes on Re-reading Irving Babbitt". *Southern Review*. 7:2 (Fall 1941) 309-325. LH.

"The Undergraduate Writer as Writer". *College English*. 3:3 (Dec. 1941) 251-264.


1942
"Una Vita Nuova". *Accent: A Quarterly of New Literature*. 2:3 (Spring 1942) 154-155. SW.


1943

"Crime and Punishment; A Study". *The Chimera: A Rough Beast*. 1:3 (Winter 1943) 7-29. EE ("Crime and Punishment: Murder in Your Own Room").


"An Abstraction Blooded" [Table of contents has "An Attraction Blooded"]'). Review of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, Wallace Stevens. *Partisan Review*. 10:3 (May 1943) 297-300. LG.


1944


1945

"The Economy of the American Writer: Preliminary Notes". *Sewanee Review*. 53:2 (Spring 1945) 175-185. LH.

"Sunt Lacrimae Rerum et Mentum Mortalia Tangunt". *Partisan Review*. 12:2 (Spring 1945) 177. GE.

"Communiques from Yalta". *Partisan Review*. 12:2 (Spring 1945) 177-8. GE.


1946


"The Good European: 1945". *Sewanee Review*. 54:3 (Summer 1946) 504-510. GE.


1947

"XII Scarabs for the Living". *Kenyon Review*. 9:1 (Winter 1947) 32-34. GE (I-XII of "Thirteen Scarabs for the Living").


"The Rape of Europa". *Partisan Review*. 14:2 (March-April 1947) 149. GE.


"Notes On Four Categories of Criticism". *The Critic*. 1:2 (Autumn 1947) 51-59. LH.


1948


"In the Birdcage: Notes on *The Possessed of Dostoevsky". *Hudson Review*. 1:1 (Spring 1948) 7-28. EE.

"A Burden for Critics". *Hudson Review*. 1:2 (Summer 1948) 170-185. LH.


"Hans Castorp: Small Lord of Counterpositions". Hudson Review. 1:3 (Autumn 1948) 318-339. EE.

1949


1950

"Parody and Critique: Notes on Thomas Mann's Doctor Faustus". Kenyon Review. 12:1 (Winter 1950) 20-40. EE.


"All's the Foul Fiend's". Partisan Review. 17:4 (April 1950) 352.

"Anna Karenina: The Dialectic of Incarnation". Kenyon Review. 12:3 (Summer 1950) 433-456. EE.


1951

"In the Hope of Straightening Things Out". On Selected Essays, T. S. Eliot. Kenyon Review. 13:2 (Spring 1951) 303-314. LH.

"Unappeasable and Peregrine: Behavior and the Four Quartets". Thought. A review of culture and idea. 26:1 (Spring 1951) 50-76. LG.

"Madame Bovary: Beauty out of Place". Kenyon Review. 13:3 (Summer 1951) 475-503. EE.

"The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James: Notes on the Underlying Classic Form in the Novel". Accent. 11:3 (Summer 1951) 129-146. LH.

"The artist as a hero: A disconsolate chimera". Art News. 50:5 (Sept. 1951) 18-21, 52. LH.

[A peculiar mistake in RPB's biographical note in this item: "R. P. Blackmur, equally well known as a poet and one of the most brilliant of the "new critics," is at present on the faculty of Princeton University's Creative Arts Program. His books include The Second World War, poems, and The Expense of Greatness." The book of poems is titled The Second World.]

"Mr. Virtue and the Three Bears". Poetry: A Magazine of Verse. 79:3 (December 1951) 144-145.

1952


"Dante's Ten Terms for the Treatment of the Treatise". Kenyon Review. 14:2 (Spring 1952) 286-300. LH.


1953


1954

"Between the Numen and the Moha: Notes towards a Theory of the Novel". Sewanee Review. 62:1 (Jan.-March 1954) 1-23. LH.

[Numen is a word for morals or a higher power; Moha for behavior, or "the basic, irremediable, irreplaceable, characteristic, and contemptuous stupidity of man confronted with choice or purpose": they are Sanskrit words that RPB got from J. Robert Oppenheimer, the atomic physicist, while both were at Princeton and would have weekly lunch meetings at Lahière's on Witherspoon Street (see Alvarez, Where Did it All Go Right?). First delivered as a lecture at the Vermont Summer School while teaching with Jack Aldridge, who has "a very clear recollection of the stunned reception accorded" the talk by an audience of students and unsuspecting townsfolk.]

"Towards a Modus Vivendi". Kenyon Review. 16:4 (Autumn 1954) 507-535. LH.

[Originally distributed in mimeographed copies to Rockefeller Foundation officers. In 1955, 30 offprints paid by the RF for distribution to "people in the Near East and others".]

1955


“Reflections of Toynbee”. Kenyon Review. 17:3 (Summer 1955) 357-370. PI.

“The Language of Silence: A Citation”. Sewanee Review. 63:3 (Jul.-Sep 1955) 382-404.


1956

1957


1958


1959


1960


1961


1963


1964


1980


1983


2014


Poems in Anthologies


Contributions to Books


RPB's contribution: "On reflection I don't see any point in making a sentence or two of general tribute. I think Ransom knows how well I think of him and for how long a time, and he certainly needs no reassurance of my affection, respect and admiration. I would like to think that he and I were going out for a lobster dinner after a half bottle of Old Crow. Besides the lobster and the Old Crow I suppose it ought to be more important that there never was a better editor to work for."

As Editor

The Hound & Horn: 1928-1930. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Hound and Horn, Inc.

Masthead:

EDITORS

BERNARD BANDLER II   VARIAN FRY
R. P. BLACKMUR   LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

[Blackmur was referred to as Managing Editor or Editing Manager in correspondence, and received a small salary. Bernard Bandler: "We needed someone to act as our business manager and oversee the editorial side and I felt that the salary would free him from selling books and give him some opportunity for his own writing. I guess we were the first Guggenheim Foundation in Dick's life." From Russell Fraser, interview with Bandler (March 1977). Fraser, A Mingled Yarn, 58.]


"The rule of selection was neither unity of theme, a common technique, nor the exhibition of any sectional dogma, but rather the opposite of these—multiplicity of theme, variety of technique, and the illustration of merely poetic connections. It seemed, further, better to prefer the tentative to the established, the experimental to the settled, so long as the modes of writing themselves were well laid out. It is therefore a matter of course that two of the contributions are extracted from longer works. —R. P. BLACKMUR."

S. Foster Damon - "Little Josiah's Song"
Dudley Fitts - "Homage to Rafael Alberti"
Kimball Flaccus - "Islanders"
Sherry Mangan - "Walk Do Not Run"
Winfield Townley Scott - "For Certain Sectionalists"
John Wheelwright - I, II From "The Mirror of Venus"
Theodore Spencer - "Old Man's Song"
R. P. Blackmur - "Pone Metum"

Perspectives 6: Winter 1954. Editor for this issue alone, printed in 5 different editions:

Perspectives USA. Brooklyn: Intercultural Publications.

Perspectives. London: Hamish Hamilton, Ltd.

[William Goodman, Letter. London Review of Books. 18:18 (19 Sept. 1996): "When Perry Miller and I were putting together Major Writers of America, a large two-volume anthology for college students, at Harcourt, Brace in 1961 and 1962, the plan was to ask a scholar or critic to select and introduce each of the writers. To prepare the section for T.S. Eliot, we asked R.P. Blackmur. He agreed and responded in fairly short order with a list of what he thought essential. Miller agreed and I then asked Eliot whether he approved. Since Harcourt was Eliot’s American publisher, I was aware that such approval was necessary before Blackmur could proceed. Eliot was concerned, in permissions for college anthologies, that he not appear in too many such books at the same time and so kept his permission for such use quite low each year. Blackmur's list included a characteristic passage from After Strange Gods (1934). Eliot objected, making it plain that because the selection from his work in the proposed anthology might well be seen as 'official', Harcourt having been his American publisher for so long, he did not wish the passage to appear. Blackmur, Miller and I regretted the loss because losing it diminished the representativeness of what Blackmur had done, but Eliot was quite within his rights as the copyright holder. A substitution was made and the anthology published. After Strange Gods was not a book Eliot wanted used in anthologies or reprinted by itself. The book exists in libraries, of course, and, once time extinguishes its copyright, may well be reprinted one day to continue its inexpungible damage to his reputation.”]

Archival Material

Firestone and Mudd Libraries, Princeton University. Princeton, NJ.

I. Writings, 1920-1964
II. Correspondence, 1864-1965
III. Photographs, Artwork, and Recordings circa 1920s-1960s
IV. Teaching Materials, 1940-1963


Houghton Library, Harvard University. Cambridge, MA.
R. P. Blackmur poems. b MS Am 1880.

R. P. Blackmur Letters to George Anthony Palmer. b MS Am 1880.1.

Sherry Mangan Papers. b MS Am 1816.

**Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. New Haven, CT.**
Box 1, folder 13: R. P. Blackmur letters.


I. Correspondence, 1925-1940
II. Other Materials, 1927-1934 [financial records, ephemera]

**Southern Review** papers. YCAL MSS 694. Yale Collection of American Literature.
Series I: Correspondence. Box 1.

**Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. Chicago, IL.**

Morton Dauwen Zabel Papers. Box 1, folder 8: R. P. Blackmur correspondence.

**Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Atlanta, GA.**

Box 1, folder 11 (subseries 1.1): R. P. Blackmur subject file
Box 19, folder 8 (subseries 1.3): *The Good European*, typescripts
Box 19, folder 9 (subseries 1.3): *The Good European*, page proofs
Box 19, folder 10 (subseries 1.3): *The Second World*, typescripts

**Rockefeller Archive Center. Tarrytown, NY.**
Rockefeller Foundation records.

RG 1.1, Series 200R, Box 243, folders 2906-2910 (Literary Magazines Study, 1944-1947)
RG 1.2, Series 200R, Box 407, folders 3511-3512 (Princeton University - Literary Criticism, 1947-1951)
RG 1.2, Series 200R, Box 358, folder 3242 (Kenyon College - Kenyon Review.
RG 3.2 (Program and Policy), series 900, Box 89, Folder 494 (Villa Serbelloni - Scholars - Blackmur, 1960-1962)
Two documents in the file relating to Blackmur, 1941, are digitized on the RF Centennial website: http://www.rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/culture/literature.

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library. Newark, DE.
Archive of Pagany. Series 1, F18, R. P. Blackmur correspondence.

Maine State Library. Augusta, ME.
Maine Authors Collection, Special Collections.

Newberry Library. Chicago, IL

Washington University Library, Special Collections. St. Louis, MO.
Lee Anderson Papers. MSS004.
  - Box 1, folder 7; R. P. Blackmur correspondence.
  - Box 34; Audiotapes of lectures on recorded poetry, incl. Blackmur reading sections of From Jordan’s Delight, with Anderson’s commentary.

Columbia University Archival Collections. New York, NY.
Richard P. Blackmur manuscripts. MS#0123. Uncataloged novels, plays and short stories by Blackmur. Photographs mounted in each of five volumes.
Includes The Greater Torment (novel), King Pandar (novel), Plays ("The Conqueror", "Follow the Leader", "Hero", "The Taking of Avis"), Short Stories (33 stories).

About Blackmur

Bibliography


**Books and Monographs**


**Reviews and Essays**


5 opinions: John Malcolm Brinnin, Ruthven Todd, Kenneth Rexroth, Lionel Abel, Harold Norse


Flint, F. Cudworth. "Contemporary Criticism". The Southern Review. 2:1 (Summer 1936) 208-224.

Foster, Richard. "Criticism as Poetry". Criticism. 1:2 (Spring 1959) 100-122.


Mazer, Ben. "Cambridge in the Twenties: Notes on Some Forgotten Texts".  

McCabe, Bernard. Review of *Eleven Essays in the European Novel*, Blackmur;  


5 opinions: John Malcolm Brinnin, Ruthven Todd, Kenneth Rexroth, Lionel Abel, Harold Norse

Quarrel with Blackmur over interpretation of Cummings' poem.


--- "Ubiquitous Moralists". Kenyon Review. 3:1 (Winter 1941) 95-100.


5 opinions: John Malcolm Brinnin, Ruthven Todd, Kenneth Rexroth, Lionel Abel, Harold Norse


5 opinions: John Malcolm Brinnin, Ruthven Todd, Kenneth Rexroth, Lionel Abel, Harold Norse.


**In Other Books**


**Fiction and Poems**


Further Reading


--- *is 5*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926.


Two copied typescripts of *The Lords of Limit* have epigraphs of quotations from R. P. Blackmur and William Wordsworth. On both copies (held at University of Leeds, ref #: Brotherton Collection MS 20c Hill/4/9/3A), the quotations from Wordsworth and Blackmur are scored out.


[Blackmur's first love, Tessa Gilbert, was one of Arthur C. Inman's hired "talkers" and makes frequent appearances in the diary. Aaron's edition uses a pseudonym to refer to her; she appears as "Therese Raleigh"].


--- *Political Self-Portrait*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1940.
Note

A detailed list of the books from Blackmur’s library, held at Princeton, can be found online at http://libweb2.princeton.edu/rbsc2/misc/Bib_4178837.pdf
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