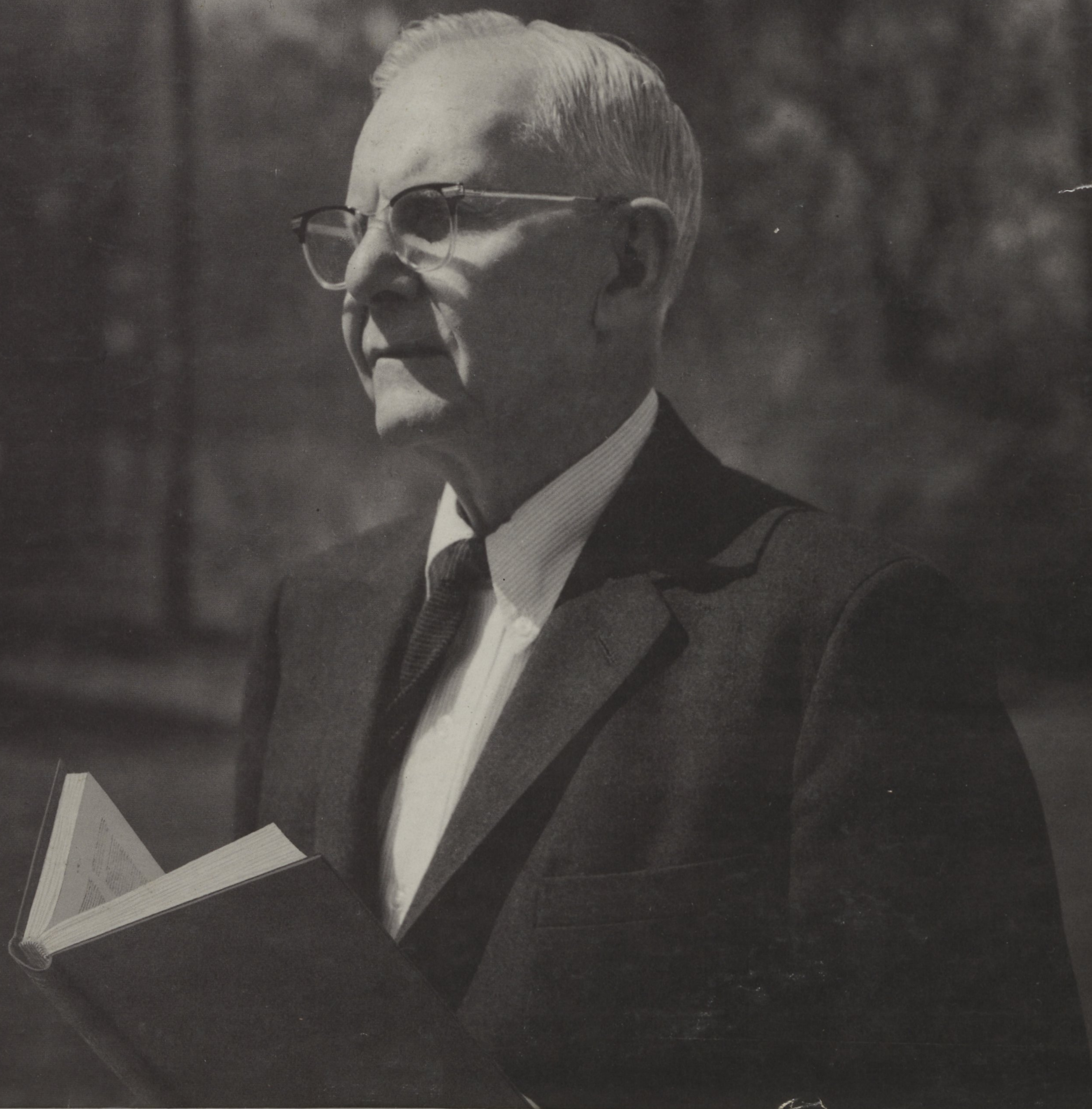


Yale series of recorded poets John Crowe Ransom

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John Crowe Ransom reads from his own works

## Yale Series of Recorded Poets

Produced by the Yale University Department of English and Audio Visual Center Edited by Alvin B. Kernan

John Crowe Ransom belongs to that distinguished, and dwindling, tradition of humane letters which requires the practice of all the literary arts, teaching, criticism, poetry, with high professional competence and dedication, but without the narrowing zeal of the single-minded specialist, and without loss of awareness that these arts are humane, that they bear directly on life as we all must live it. A teacher of literature for over forty years, first at Vanderbilt and then at Kenyon, Ransom has become one of the outstanding teachers of our age. His students, to mention only a few, define his ability: Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Randall Jarrell, Andrew Lytle, and Robert Lowell. As a scholar and critic Ransom has been prominent in the new critical movement and influential in restoring to poetry some of its ancient dignity. In his prose works, *God Without Thunder*, *The World's Body*, *The New Criticism*, and in numerous articles in *The Kenyon Review* (which he established in 1939 and continued to edit until 1960), he has argued precisely and learnedly that in an age in which mechanical and abstract forms of description have become dominant, poetical perceptions and statements, in life as well as art, are still necessary if we are to see man and his world whole.

Ransom's tradition and his criticism find solid expression in the images and dramatic situations of his poetry. He was already writing poetry when he was a Rhodes Scholar (1910-1913), but his first published volume, *Poems About God*, appeared in 1919. *Chills and Fever* followed in 1924, and *Two Gentlemen in Bonds* in 1927. The *Selected Poems*, which contains all poems on this record, was printed in 1945 and contains only a few works which did not appear in the earlier volumes; but among these are two of Ransom's most important poems, "Painted Head," and "Address to the Scholars of New England" in which he gives a compressed but complete statement of the philosophy underlying his criticism and the poetic which shapes his view of life and art.

But these full-dress treatments of theory are rare in Ransom's poetry. Usually his subjects appear at first too commonplace to contain serious issues, for he deals regularly with such matters as a young woman sullen because a sudden spring storm has destroyed her flowers, a bedraggled bird at the windowpane, a child's pet hen killed by a bee, a domestic quarrel, or the nesting habits of ducks. Even when he treats a traditionally heroic theme such as knight-errantry in "Captain Carpenter," or the mission of St. Paul in "Our Two Worthies," Ransom handles his subject in a way which transfers the scene to a small American town and transforms the characters, in part, to familiar village faces. Captain Carpenter, while he retains the dignity and honor of a chivalric hero on quest, becomes at the same time the local idealist always throwing himself into some good cause, and always soundly drubbed. St. Paul seems like nothing so much as a vigorous young preacher, fresh from the seminary, exulting over the fact that Jesus has left him a theology that needs tidying up, and a number of sinners to smite.

This local quality in setting and character give Ransom's poems a solid basis in reality, in the day-to-day facts of life. Yet each of his simple scenes dramatizes what to Ransom is the central conflict in western thought: the debate between the mind and the body, the reason and the imagination, or, to use his own critical terms, between science and poetry. Ransom's poetry is a poetry of opposites, of chills and fever, head and body, honor and love, death and beauty, husband and wife, Exegete and Paraclete, and experience and innocence. The characteristic form of the poems is that of a fable in which these conflicting views of life are embodied in the *dramatis personae* and demonstrated by the way in which the characters see and respond to such crucial human events as death, love and marriage, or to such natural events as storms, birds, and waterfalls. The experienced, the practical, view of life—usually held in the poems by rational men, by the philosophers—reduces an experience like the death of a small boy to a brutal fact, "dead boy," just as it reduced him in life to "a pig with a pasty face . . . squealing for cookies." But to the eyes of innocence—the women, the very young and very old, and the idealistic—the boy had been "a black cloud full of storms," and his death "a deep dynastic wound." The poems offer no easy solution to these problems—the boy is neither "pig" nor "black cloud," but both—and the men and women never resolve their antithetical views of the same experience. They are eternally caught between the contradictory realities inherent in the world and within human nature, and find themselves, like the lovers in "The Equilibrists," who cannot love because of honor, or be content with honor because of love, "spinning, orbited nice, their flames . . . not more radiant than their ice."

If the characters remain trapped in a world where the parts are "so hardly one," and yet so "terribly are two," and if they "rend and murder trying to get undone," the poetic "voice" which recounts and comments on these fables refuses to accept the limitations of either point of view. It is a complex voice: sometimes it is politely rustic, employing mountain archaisms like "bruit" and "thole," or colloquialisms like "county kin," and "she went sullen." Or it will make use of Biblical phrases in referring to a small boy as "sword beneath his mother's heart." It comically displays its own simplicity in being "astonished" at the death of a little girl; in becoming completely involved with Captain Carpenter and cheering him on against his adversaries, "I wish he had delivered half his blows;" or in exclaiming with surprise that Judith destroyed Holofernes with such ease and without harm to herself, "Nor brushed her with even so much as a daisy?" And yet at the same time this voice is sophisticated and learned, referring easily to mythology and history, employing with exactitude literary devices such as Skeltonic meters, using freely the language of romance, and constructing puns based on the exact etymological meaning of words. This diversity of characteristics produces the wit which plays over the events of the poems, subjecting each view of life to ironic scrutiny and mediat-

ing between the opposites which are Ransom's characteristic subject. If it reveals the sentimentality and ludicrous tendencies of certain innocent views of life—or if it at least shows the impossibility of retaining them—at the same time it can make clear the pomposity and emptiness of a purely experienced and rational view. Both approaches to experience are embodied in this voice, and at the same time that it laughs, gently, at a world where men and women torture themselves by denying one half of their beings, it displays through its own awareness of the complexity of man and nature the necessity of accepting an existence which is neither mere fact nor pure idea, and accepting it with the "mixed feelings" which it requires of us.

This balanced attitude is described perfectly by Ransom himself in the poem "Agitato ma non troppo," which opens *Chills and Fever*.

I will be brief,  
Assuredly I have grief,  
And I am shaken; but not as a leaf.

The lines are a statement of control: life passionately and profoundly felt is not to be allowed to issue as mere verbalized cry or groan, but is to be restrained and shaped into the tense compactness of a poetry in which feeling and form, heart and mind, the individual and the tradition are kept in perfect balance. —Alvin B. Kernan

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### Side I

Time: 23 min. 48 sec.

Miriam Tazewell  
Dead Boy  
Spectral Lovers  
Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter  
Good Ships  
Here Lies a Lady  
Judith of Bethulia  
Captain Carpenter  
Piazza Piece  
Lady Lost

### Side II

Time: 26 min. 37 sec.

Antique Harvesters  
Our Two Worthies  
Survey of Literature  
The Equilibrists  
What Ducks Require  
Painted Head  
Address to the Scholars of New England

This is a field recording made in the poet's own locale.

The poems in this recording were selected from the Lee Anderson Collection of Recorded Poets

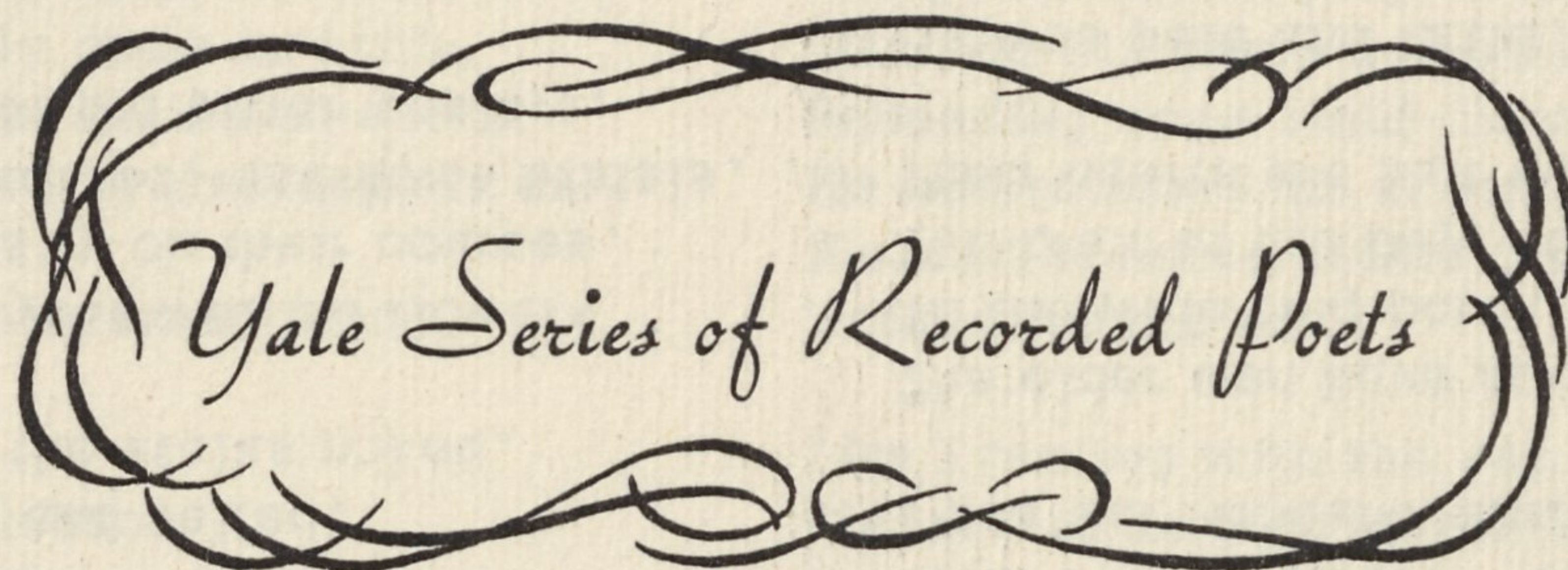
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YP 306

Yale Series of Recorded Poets  
Carillon Records  
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John Crowe Ransom

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MIRIAM TAZEWELL

When Miriam Tazewell heard the tempest bursting  
And his wrathful whips across the sky drawn crackling  
She stuffed her ears for fright like a young thing  
And with heart full of the flowers took to weeping.

But the earth shook dry his old back in good season,  
He had weathered storms that drenched him deep as  
    this one,  
And the sun, Miriam, ascended to his dominion,  
The storm was withered against his empyrean.

After the storm she went forth with skirts kilted  
To see in the strong sun her lawn deflowered,  
Her tulip, iris, peony strung and pelted,  
Pots of geranium spilled and the stalks naked.

The spring transpired in that year with no flowers  
But the regular stars went busily on their courses,  
Suppers and cards were calendared, and some bridals,  
And the birds demurely sang in the bitter poplars.

To Miriam Tazewell the whole world was villain  
To prosper when the fragile babes were fallen,  
And not to unstop her own storm and be maudlin,  
For weeks she went untidy, she went sullen.

DEAD BOY

The little cousin is dead, by foul subtraction,  
A green bough from Virginia's aged tree,  
And none of the county kin like the transaction,  
Nor some of the world of outer dark, like me.

A boy not beautiful, nor good, nor clever,  
A black cloud full of storms too hot for keeping,  
A sword beneath his mother's heart--yet never  
Woman bewept her babe as this is weeping. *I doubt*

A pig with a pasty face, so I had said,  
Squealing for cookies, kinned by poor pretense  
With a noble house. But the little man quite dead,  
I see the forbears' antique lineaments.

The elder men have strode by the box of death  
To the wide flag porch, and muttering low send round  
The bruit of the day. O friendly waste of breath!  
Their hearts are hurt with a deep dynastic wound. *wounded*

He was pale and little, the foolish neighbors say;  
The first-fruits, saith the Preacher, the Lord hath  
    taken;  
But this was the old tree's late branch wrenched away,  
Grieving the sapless limbs, the shorn and shaken.

SPECTRAL LOVERS

By night they haunted a thicket of April mist,  
Out of that black ground suddenly come to birth,  
Else angels lost in each other and fallen on earth.  
Lovers they knew they were, but why unclasped, un-  
kissed?  
Why should two lovers go frozen apart in fear?  
And yet they were, they were.

Over the shredding of an April blossom  
Scarcely her fingers touched him, quick with care,  
Yet of evasions even she made a snare.  
The heart was bold that clanged within her bosom,  
The moment perfect, the time stopped for them,  
Still her face turned from him.

Strong were the batteries of the April night  
And the stealthy emanations of the field;  
Should the walls of her prison undefended yield  
And open her treasure to the first clamorous knight?  
"This is the mad moon, and shall I surrender all?  
If he but ask it I shall."

And gesturing largely to the moon of Easter,  
Mincing his steps and swishing the jubilant grass.  
Beheading some field-flowers that had come to pass,  
He had reduced his tributaries faster  
Had not considerations pinched his heart  
Unfitly for his art.

"Am I reeling with the sap of April like a drunkard?  
Blessed is he that taketh this richest of cities;  
But it is so stainless the sack were a thousand pities.  
This is that marble fortress not to be conquered,  
Lest its white peace in the black flame turn to tinder  
And an unutterable cinder."

They passed me once in April, in the mist.  
No other season is it when one walks and discovers  
Two tall and wandering, like spectral lovers,  
White in the season's moon-gold and amethyst,  
Who touch their quick fingers fluttering like a bird  
Whose songs shall never be heard.

BELLS FOR JOHN WHITESIDE'S  
DAUGHTER

There was such speed in her little body,  
And such lightness in her footfall,  
It is no wonder her brown study  
Astonishes us all.

Her wars were bruited in our high window.  
We looked among orchard trees and beyond  
Where she took arms against her shadow,  
Or harried unto the pond

The lazy geese, like a snow cloud  
Dripping their snow on the green grass,  
Tricking and stopping, sleepy and proud,  
Who cried in goose, Alas,

For the tireless heart within the little  
Lady with rod that made them rise  
From their noon apple-dreams and scuttle  
Goose-fashion under the skies!

But now go the bells, and we are ready,  
In one house we are sternly stopped  
To say we are vexed at her brown study,  
Lying so primly propped.

GOOD SHIPS

Fleet ships encountering on the high seas  
Who speak, and then unto the vast diverge,  
These hailed each other, poised on the loud surge  
Of one of Mrs. Grundy's Tuesday teas,  
Nor trimmed one sail to baffle the driving breeze.  
A macaroon absorbed all her emotion;  
His hue was ashy but an effect of ocean;  
They exchanged the nautical technicalities.

It was only a nothing or so, and thus they parted.  
Away they sailed, most certainly bound for port,  
So seaworthy one felt they could not sink;  
Still there was a tremor shook them, I should think,  
Beautiful timbers fit for storm and sport  
And unto miserly merchant hulks converted.

HERE LIES A LADY

Here lies a lady of beauty and high degree.  
Of chills and fever she died, of fever and chills,  
The delight of her husband, her aunt, an infant of  
    three,  
And of medicos marveling sweetly on her ills.

For either she burned, and her confident eyes would  
    blaze,  
And her fingers fly in a manner to puzzle their heads--  
What was she making? Why, nothing; she sat in a  
    maze  
Of old scraps of laces, snipped into curious shreds--

Or this would pass, and the light of her fire decline  
Till she lay discouraged and cold, like a thin stalk  
    white and blown,  
And would not open her eyes, to kisses, to wine;  
The sixth of these states was her last; the cold settled  
    down.

Sweet ladies, long may ye bloom, and roughly I hope  
    ye may thole,  
But was she not lucky? In flowers and lace and mourn-  
    ing,  
In love and great honor we bade God rest her soul  
After six little spaces of chill, and six of burning.

JUDITH OF BETHULIA

Beautiful as the flying legend of some leopard  
She had not yet chosen her great captain or prince  
Depositary to her flesh, and our defense;  
And a wandering beauty is a blade out of its scabbard.  
You know how dangerous, gentlemen of threescore?  
May you know it yet ten more.

Nor by process of veiling she grew the less fabulous.  
Grey or blue veils, we were desperate to study  
The invincible emanations of her white body,  
And the winds at her ordered raiment were ominous.  
Might she walk in the market, sit in the council of  
    soldiers?  
Only of the extreme elders.

But a rare chance was the girl's then, when the Invader  
Trumpeted from the south, and rumbled from the  
    north,  
Beleaguered the city from four quarters of the earth,  
Our soldiery too craven and sick to aid her--  
Where were the arms could countervail this horde?  
Her beauty was the sword.

She sat with the elders, and proved on their blear  
    visage  
How bright was the weapon unruined in her keeping,  
While he lay surfeiting on their harvest heaping,

Wasting the husbandry of their rarest vintage--  
And dreaming of the broad-breasted dames for con-  
cubine?  
These floated on his wine.

He was lapped with bay-leaves, and grass and fumiter  
weed,  
And from under the wine-film encountered his mortal  
vision,  
For even within his tent she accomplished his derision;  
She loosed one veil and another, standing unafraid;  
And he perished. Nor brushed her with even so much  
as a daisy?  
She found his destruction easy.

The heathen are all perished. The victory was fur-  
nished,  
We smote them hiding in our vineyards, barns, an-  
nexes,  
And now their white bones clutter the holes of foxes,  
And the chieftain's head, with grinning sockets, and  
varnished--  
Is it hung on the sky with a hideous epitaphy?  
No, the woman keeps the trophy.

May God send unto our virtuous lady her prince.  
It is stated she went reluctant to that orgy,  
Yet a madness fevers our young men, and not the  
clergy

Nor the elders have turned them unto modesty since,  
Inflamed by the thought of her naked beauty with  
desire?  
Yes, and chilled with fear and despair.

#### CAPTAIN CARPENTER

Captain Carpenter rose up in his prime  
Put on his pistols and went riding out  
But had got wellnigh nowhere at that time  
Till he fell in with ladies in a rout.

It was a pretty lady and all her train  
That played with him so sweetly but before  
An hour she'd taken a sword with all her main  
And twined him of his nose for evermore.

Captain Carpenter mounted up one day  
And rode straightway into a stranger rogue  
That looked unchristian but be that as may  
The Captain did not wait upon prologue.

But drew upon him out of his great heart  
The other swung against him with a club  
And cracked his two legs at the shinny part  
And let him roll and stick like any tub.



Captain Carpenter rode many a time  
From male and female took he sundry harms  
He met the wife of Satan crying "I'm  
The she-wolf bids you shall bear no more arms."

Their strokes and counters whistled in the wind  
I wish he had delivered half his blows  
But where she should have made off like a hind  
The bitch bit off his arms at the elbows.

And Captain Carpenter parted with his ears  
To a black devil that used him in this wise  
O Jesus ere his threescore and ten years  
Another had plucked out his sweet blue eyes.

Captain Carpenter got up on his roan  
And sallied from the gate in hell's despite  
I heard him asking in the grimmest tone  
If any enemy yet there was to fight?

"To any adversary it is fame  
If he risk to be wounded by my tongue  
Or burnt in two beneath my red heart's flame  
Such are the perils he is cast among.

"But if he can he has a pretty choice  
From an anatomy with little to lose  
Whether he cut my tongue and take my voice  
Or whether it be my round red heart he choose."

It was the neatest knave that ever was seen  
Stepping in perfume from his lady's bower  
Who at this word put in his merry mien  
And fell on Captain Carpenter like a tower.

I would not knock old fellows in the dust  
But there lay Captain Carpenter on his back  
His weapons were the old heart in his bust  
And a blade shook between rotten teeth alack.

The rogue in scarlet and grey soon knew his mind  
He wished to get his trophy and depart  
With gentle apology and touch refined  
He pierced him and produced the Captain's heart.

God's mercy rest on Captain Carpenter now  
I thought him Sirs an honest gentleman  
Citizen husband soldier and scholar enow  
Let jangling kites eat of him if they can.

But God's deep curses follow after those  
That shore him of his goodly nose and ears  
His legs and strong arms at the two elbows  
And eyes that had not watered seventy years.

The curse of hell upon the sleek upstart  
That got the Captain finally on his back  
And took the red red vitals of his heart  
And made the kites to whet their beaks clack clack.

PIAZZA PIECE

--I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying  
To make you hear. Your ears are soft and small  
And listen to an old man not at all,  
They want the young men's whispering and sighing.  
But see' the roses on your trellis dying  
And hear the spectral singing of the moon;  
For I must have my lovely lady soon,  
I am a gentleman in a dustcoat trying.

--I am a lady young in beauty waiting  
Until my truelove comes, and then we kiss.  
But what grey man among the vines is this  
Whose words are dry and faint as in a dream?  
Back from my trellis, Sir, before I scream!  
I am a lady young in beauty waiting.

LADY LOST

This morning, flew up the lane  
A timid lady bird to our birdbath  
And eyed her image dolefully as death;  
This afternoon, knocked on our windowpane  
To be let in from the rain.

And when I caught her eye  
She looked aside, but at the clapping thunder  
And sight of the whole world blazing up like tinder  
Looked in on us again most miserably,  
Indeed as if she would cry.

So I will go out into the park and say,  
"Who has lost a delicate brown-eyed lady  
In the West End section? Or has anybody  
Injured some fine woman in some dark way  
Last night, or yesterday?"

"Let the owner come and claim possession,  
No questions will be asked. But stroke her gently  
With loving words, and she will evidently  
Return to her full soft-haired white-breasted fashion  
And her right home and her right passion."

TWO IN AUGUST

Two that could not have lived their single lives  
As can some husbands and wives  
Did something strange: they tensed their vocal cords  
And attacked each other with silences and words  
Like catapulted stones and arrowed knives.

Dawn was not yet; night is for loving or sleeping,  
Sweet dreams or safekeeping;  
Yet he of the wide brows that were used to laurel  
And she, the famed for gentleness, must quarrel.  
Furious both of them, and scared, and weeping.

How sleepers groan, twitch, wake to such a mood  
Is not well understood,  
Nor why two entities grown almost one  
Should rend and murder trying to get undone,  
With individual tigers in their blood.

She in terror fled from the marriage chamber  
Circuiting the dark rooms like a string of amber  
Round and round and back,  
And would not light one lamp against the black,  
And heard the clock that clanged: Remember,  
Remember.

And he must tread barefooted the dim lawn,  
Soon he was up and gone;  
High in the trees the night-mastered birds were crying  
With fear upon their tongues, no singing nor flying  
Which are their lovely attitudes by dawn.

Whether those bird-cries were of heaven or hell  
There is no way to tell;  
In the long ditch of darkness the man walked  
Under the hackberry trees where the birds talked  
With words too sad and strange to syllable.

### ANTIQUÉ HARVESTERS

(Scene: Of the Mississippi the bank sinister, and of the  
Ohio the bank sinister.)

Tawny are the leaves turned but they still hold,  
And it is harvest; what shall this land produce?  
A meager hill of kernels, a runnel of juice;  
Declension looks from our land, it is old.  
Therefore let us assemble, dry, grey, spare,  
And mild as yellow air.

"I hear the croak of a raven's funeral wing."  
The young men would be joying in the song  
Of passionate birds; their memories are not long.  
What is it thus rehearsed in sable? "Nothing."  
Trust not but the old endure, and shall be older  
Than the scornful beholder.

We pluck the spindling ears and gather the corn.  
One spot has special yield? "On this spot stood  
Heroes and drenched it with their only blood."  
And talk meets talk, as echoes from the horn  
Of the hunter--echoes are the old men's arts,  
Ample are the chambers of their hearts.

Here come the hunters, keepers of a rite;  
The horn, the hounds, the lank mares coursing by  
Straddled with archetypes of chivalry;

And the fox, lovely ritualist, in flight  
Offering his unearthly ghost to quarry;  
And the fields, themselves to harry.

Resume, harvesters. The treasure is full bronze  
Which you will garner for the Lady, and the moon  
Could tinge it no yellower than does this noon;  
But grey will quench it shortly--the field, men, stones.  
Pluck fast, dreamers; prove as you amble slowly  
Not less than men, not wholly.

Bare the arm, dainty youths, bend the knees  
Under bronze burdens. And by an autumn tone  
As by a grey, as by a green, you will have known  
Your famous Lady's image; for so have these;  
And if one say that easily will your hands  
More prosper in other lands,

Angry as wasp-music be your cry then:  
"Forsake the Proud Lady, of the heart of fire,  
The look of snow, to the praise of a dwindled choir,  
Song of degenerate specters that were men?  
The sons of the fathers shall keep her, worthy of  
What these have done in love."

True, it is said of our Lady, she ageth.  
But see, if you peep shrewdly, she hath not stooped;  
Take no thought of her servitors that have drooped,  
For we are nothing; and if one talk of death--  
Why, the ribs of the earth subsist frail as a breath  
If but God wearieth.

### OUR TWO WORTHIES

All the here and all the there  
Ring with the praises of the pair:  
Jesus the Paraclete  
And Saint Paul the Exegete.

Jesus proclaimed the truth.  
Paul's missionary tooth  
Shredded it fine, and made a paste,  
No particle going to waste,  
Kneaded it and caked it  
And buttered it and baked it  
(And indeed all but digested  
While Jesus went to death and rested)  
Into a marketable compound  
Ready to lay on any wound,  
Meet to prescribe to our distress  
And feed unto our emptiness.

And this is how the Pure Idea  
Became our perfect panacea,  
Both external and internal  
And supernal and infernal.

When the great captains die,  
There is some faithful standing by  
To whom the chieftain hands his sword.  
Proud Paul received--a Word.

This was the man who, given his cause,  
Gave constitution and by-laws,  
Distinguished pedagogue  
Who invaded the synagogue  
And in a little while  
Was proselyting the Gentile.

But what would there have been for Paul  
If the Source had finished all?  
He blessed the mighty Paraclete  
For needing him, to miss defeat,  
He couldn't have done anything  
But for his Captain spiriting.

He knew that he was competent  
For any sort of punishment,  
With his irresistible urge  
To bare his back unto the scourge,  
Teasing his own neck  
In prodigious shipwreck;  
Hunger and rats and gaol  
Were mere detail.

Paul was every inch of him  
Valiant as the Seraphim,  
And all he went among  
Confessed his marvelous tongue,  
And Satan fearing the man's spell  
Embittered smote the gates of Hell.

So he finished his fight  
And he too went from sight.

Then let no cantankerous schism  
Corrupt this our catechism  
But one and all let us repeat:  
Who then is Jesus?  
He is our Paraclete.  
And Paul, out of Tarsus?  
He is our Exegete.

#### SURVEY OF LITERATURE

In all the good Greek of Plato  
I lack my roastbeef and potato.

A better man was Aristotle,  
Pulling steady on the bottle.

I dip my hat to Chaucer,  
Swilling soup from his saucer,

And to Master Shakespeare  
Who wrote big on small beer.

The abstemious Wordsworth  
Subsisted on a curd's-worth,

But a slick one was Tennyson,  
Putting gravy on his venison.

What these men had to eat and drink  
Is what we say and what we think.

The influence of Milton  
Came wry out of Stilton.

Sing a song for Percy Shelley,  
Drowned in pale lemon jelly,

And for precious John Keats,  
Dripping blood of pickled beets.

Then there was poor Willie Blake,  
He foundered on sweet cake.

God have mercy on the sinner  
Who must write with no dinner,

No gravy and no grub,  
No pewter and no pub,

No belly and no bowels,  
Only consonants and vowels.

### THE EQUILIBRISTS

Full of her long white arms and milky skin  
He had a thousand times remembered sin.  
Alone in the press of people traveled he,  
Minding her jacinth, and myrrh, and ivory.

Mouth he remembered: the quaint orifice  
From which came heat that flamed upon the kiss,  
Till cold words came down spiral from the head.  
Grey doves from the officious tower illsped.

Body: it was a white field ready for love,  
On her body's field, with the gaunt tower above,  
The lilies grew, beseeching him to take,  
If he would pluck and wear them, bruise and break.

Eyes talking: Never mind the cruel words,  
Embrace my flowers, but not embrace the swords.  
But what they said, the doves came straightway flying  
And unsaid: Honor, Honor, they came crying.

Importunate her doves. Too pure, too wise,  
Clambering on his shoulder, saying, Arise,  
Leave me now, and never let us meet,  
Eternal distance now command thy feet.

Predicament indeed, which thus discovers  
Honor among thieves, Honor between lovers.  
O such a little word is Honor, they feel!  
But the grey word is between them cold as steel.

At length I saw these lovers fully were come  
Into their torture of equilibrium;  
Dreadfully had forsworn each other, and yet  
They were bound each to each, and they did not for-  
get.

And rigid as two painful stars, and twirled  
About the clustered night their prison world,  
They burned with fierce love always to come near,  
But honor beat them back and kept them clear.

Ah, the strict lovers, they are ruined now!  
I cried in anger. But with puddled brow  
Devising for those gibbeted and brave  
Came I descanting: Man, what would you have?

For spin your period out, and draw your breath,  
A kinder saeculum begins with Death.  
Would you ascend to Heaven and bodiless dwell?  
Or take your bodies honorless to Hell?

In Heaven you have heard no marriage is,  
No white flesh tinder to your lecheries,  
Your male and female tissue sweetly shaped  
Sublimed away, and furious blood escaped.

Great lovers lie in Hell, the stubborn ones  
Infatuate of the flesh upon the bones;  
Stuprate, they rend each other when they kiss,  
The pieces kiss again, no end to this.

But still I watched them spinning, orbited nice.  
Their flames were not more radiant than their ice.  
I dug in the quiet earth and wrought the tomb  
And made these lines to memorize their doom:--

#### Epitaph

Equilibrists lie here; stranger, tread light;  
Close, but untouching in each other's sight;  
Mouldered the lips and ashy the tall skull.  
Let them lie perilous and beautiful.

#### WHAT DUCKS REQUIRE

Ducks require no ship and sail  
Bellied on the foamy skies,  
Who scud north. Male and female  
Make a slight nest to arise  
Where they overtake the spring,  
Which clogs with muddy going.

The zone unready. But the pond,  
Eye of a bleak Cyclops visage, catches  
Such glints of hyacinth and bland  
As bloom in aquarelles of ditches  
On a cold spring ground, a freak,  
A weathering chance even in the wrack.

The half-householders for estate  
Beam their floor with ribs of grass,  
Disdain your mortises and slate  
And Lar who invalidated lies,  
The marsh quakes dangerous, the port  
Where wet and dry precisely start.

Furled, then, the quadrate wing  
From the lewd eye and fowler's gun  
Till in that wet sequestering,  
Webtoed, the progeny is done,  
Cold-hatched, the infant prodigy tries  
To preen his feathers for the skies.

Prodigious in his wide degrees  
Who where the winds and waters blow  
On raveling banks of fissured seas  
In reeds nestles, or will rise and go  
Where Capricornus dips his hooves  
In the blue chasm of no wharves.

#### PAINTED HEAD

By dark severance the apparition head  
Smiles from the air a capital on no  
Column or a Platonic perhaps head  
On a canvas sky depending from nothing;

Stirs up an old illusion of grandeur  
By tickling the instinct of heads to be  
Absolute and to try decapitation  
And to play truant from the body bush;

But too happy and beautiful for those sorts  
Of head (homekeeping heads are happiest)  
Discovers maybe thirty unwidowed years  
Of not dishonoring the faithful stem;

Is nameless and has authored for the evil  
Historian headhunters neither book  
Nor state and is therefore distinct from tart  
Heads with crowns and guilty gallery heads;

So that the extravagant device of art  
Unhousing by abstraction this once head  
Was capital irony by a loving hand  
That knew the no treason of a head like this;

Makes repentance in an unlovely head  
For having vinegarly traduced the flesh  
Till, the hurt flesh refusing, the hard egg  
Is shrunken to its own deathlike surface;

And an image thus. The body bears the head  
(So hardly one they terribly are two)  
Feeds and obeys and unto please what end?  
Not to the glory of tyrant head but to



The increase of body. Beauty is of body.  
The flesh contouring shallowly on a head  
Is a rock-garden needing body's love  
And best bodiness to colorify

The big blue birds sitting and sea-shell flats  
And caves, and on the iron acropolis  
To spread the hyacinthine hair and rear  
The olive garden for the nightingales.

ADDRESS TO THE SCHOLARS  
OF NEW ENGLAND

(Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Poem, June 23, 1939)

When Sarah Pierrepont let her spirit rage  
Her love and scorn refused the bauble earth  
(Which took bloom even here, under the Bear)  
And groped for the Essence sitting in himself,  
Subtle, I think, for a girl's unseasoned rage.

The late and sudden extravagance of soul  
By which they all were swollen exalted her  
At seventeen years to Edwards' canopy,  
A match pleasing to any Heaven, had not  
The twelve mortal labors harassed her soul.

Thrifty and too proud were the sea-borne fathers  
Who fetched the Pure Idea in a bound box

And fastened him in a steeple, to have his court  
Shabby with an unkingly establishment  
And Sabbath levees for the minion fathers.

The majesty of Heaven has a great house,  
And even if the Indian kingdom or the fox  
Ran barking mad in a wide forest place,  
They had his threshold, and you had the dream  
Of property in him by a steeped house.

If once the entail shall come on raffish sons,  
Knife-wit scholar and merchant sharp in thumb,  
With positive steel they'll pry into the steeple,  
And blinking through the cracked ribs at the void  
A judgment laughter rakes the cynic sons.

But like prevailing wind New England's honor  
Carried, and teased small Southern boys in school,  
Whose heads the temperate birds fleeing your winter  
Construed for, but the stiff heroes abashed  
With their frozen fingers and unearthly honor.

Scared by the holy megrims of those Pilgrims,  
I thought the unhumbléd and outcast and cold  
Were the rich Heirs traveling incognito,  
Bred too fine for the country's sweet produce  
And but affecting that dog's life of pilgrims.

There used to be debate of soul and body,  
The soul storming incontinent with shrew's tongue

Against what natural brilliance body had loved,  
Even the green phases though deciduous  
Of earth's zodiac homage to the body.

Plato, before Plotinus gentled him,  
Spoke the soul's part, and though its vice is known  
We're in his shadow still, and it appears  
Your founders most of all the nations held  
By his scandal-mongering, and established him.

Perfect was the witch foundering in water,  
The blasphemer that spraddled in the stocks,  
The woman branded with her sin, the whales  
Of ocean taken with a psalmer's sword,  
The British tea infusing the bay's water.

But they reared heads into the always clouds  
And stooped to the event of war or bread,  
The secular perforces and short speech  
Being labors surlily done with the left hand,  
The chief strength giddy with transcendent clouds.

The tangent Heavens mocked the fathers' strength,  
And how the young sons know it, and study now  
To take fresh conquest of the conquered earth,  
But they're too strong for that, you've seen them whip  
The laggard will to deeds of lunatic strength.

To incline the powerful living unto peace  
With Heaven is easier now, with Earth is hard,  
Yet a rare metaphysic makes them one,  
A gentle Majesty, whose myrtle and rain  
Enforce the fathers' gravestones unto peace.

I saw the youngling bachelors of Harvard  
Lit like torches, and scrambling to disperse  
Like aimless firebrands pitiful to slake,  
And if there's passion enough for half their flame,  
Your wisdom has done this, sages of Harvard.

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4. The Equibrists
5. What Ducks Require
6. Painted Head
7. Address to the Scholars  
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