

H.D.

Oread¹

1914

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

The Pool

1915

Are you alive?
I touch you.
You quiver like a sea-fish.
I cover you with my net.
What are you—banded one?

The Helmsman

1916

O be swift—
we have always known you wanted us.

We fled inland with our flocks.
we pastured them in hollows,
cut off from the wind
and the salt track of the marsh.

We worshipped inland—
we stepped past wood-flowers,
we forgot your tang,
we brushed wood-grass.

¹ Oreads are the nymphs of the trees in Greek mythology.

We wandered from pine-hills
through oak and scrub-oak tangles,
we broke hyssop and bramble.
we caught flower and new bramble-fruit
in our hair: we laughed
as each branch whipped back,
we tore our feet in half-buried rocks
and knotted roots and acorn-cups.

We forgot—we worshipped,
we parted green from green.
we sought further thickets,
we dipped our ankles
through leaf-mould and earth.
and wood and wood-bank enchanted us—

and the feel of the clefts in the bark,
and the slope between tree and tree—
and a slender path strung field to field
and wood to wood
and hill to hill
and the forest after it.

We forgot—for a moment
tree-resin, tree-bark,
sweat of a torn branch
were sweet to taste.

We were enchanted with the fields,
the tufts of coarse grass
in the shorter grass—
we loved all this.

But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—drops—
climbs—hesitates—crawls back—
climbs—hesitates—
O be swift—
we have always known you wanted us.

Eurydice

1917

I

So you have swept me back,
I who could have walked with the live souls
above the earth,
I who could have slept among the live flowers
at last;

so for your arrogance
and your ruthlessness
I am swept back
where dead lichens drip
dead cinders upon moss of ash;

so for your arrogance
I am broken at last,
I who had lived almost unconscious,
who was almost forgot;

if you had let me wait
I had grown from listlessness
into peace,
if you had let me rest with the dead,
I had forgot you
and the past.

II

Here only flame upon flame
and black among the red sparks,
streaks of black and light
grown colourless;

why did you turn back,
that hell should be reinhabited
of myself thus
swept into nothingness?

why did you turn?
why did you glance back?
why did you hesitate for that moment?
why did you bend your face
caught with the flame of the upper earth,
above my face?

what was it that crossed my face
 with the light from yours
 and your glance?
 what was it you saw in my face?
 the light of your own face,
 the fire of your own presence?

What had my face to offer
 but reflex of the earth,
 hyacinth color
 caught in the raw fissure in the rock
 where the light struck,
 and the colour of azure crocuses
 and the bright surface of gold crocuses
 and of the wind-flower,
 swift in its veins as lightening
 and as white.

III

Saffron from the fringe of the earth,
 wild saffron that has bent
 over the sharp edge of earth,
 all the flowers that cut through the earth,
 all, all the flowers are lost;

everything is lost,
 everything is crossed with black,
 black upon black
 and worse than black,
 this colourless light.

IV

Fringe upon fringe
 of blue crocuses,
 crocuses, walled against blue of themselves,
 blue of that upper earth,
 blue of the depth upon depth of flowers,
 lost;

flowers,
 if I could have taken once my breath of them,
 enough of them,
 more than earth,
 even than of the upper earth,
 had passed with me
 beneath the earth;

if I could have caught up from the earth,
 the whole of the flowers of the earth,
 if once I could have breathed into myself
 the very golden crocuses
 and the red,
 and the very golden hearts of the first saffron,
 the whole of the golden mass,
 the whole of the great fragrance,
 I could have dared the loss.

V

So for your arrogance
 and your ruthlessness
 I have lost the earth
 and the flowers of the earth,
 and the live souls above the earth,
 and you who passed across the light
 and reached
 ruthless;

you who have your own light,
 who are to yourself a presence,
 who need no presence;

yet for all your arrogance
 and your glance,
 I tell you this:

such loss is no loss,
 such terror, such coils and strands and pitfalls
 of blackness,
 such terror
 is no loss;

hell is no worse than your earth
 above the earth,
 hell is no worse,
 no, nor your flowers
 nor your veins of light
 nor your presence,
 a loss;

my hell is no worse than yours
 though you pass among the flowers and speak
 with the spirits above the earth.

VI

Against the black
I have more fervour
than you in all the splendour of that place,
against the blackness
and the stark grey
I have more light;

and the flowers,
if I should tell you,
you would turn from your own fit paths
toward hell,
turn again and glance back
and I would sink into a place
even more terrible than this.

VII

At least I have the flowers of myself,
and my thoughts, no god
can take that;
I have the fervour of myself for a presence
and my own spirit for light;

and my spirit with its loss
knows this;
though small against the black,
small against the formless rocks,
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,
hell must break open like a red rose
for the dead to pass.

Pygmalion

1917

I

Shall I let myself be caught
in my own light,
shall I let myself be broken
in my own heat,
or shall I cleft the rock as of old
and break my own fire
with its surface ?

Does this fire thwart me
and my craft,
or my work—
does it cloud this light;
which is the god,
which the stone
the god takes for his use ?

II

Which am I,
The stone or the power
that lifts the rock from the earth ?
Am I the master of this fire,
is this fire my own strength ?

Am I the master of this
swirl upon swirl of light—
have I made it as in old times
I made the gods from the rock ?

Have I made this fire from myself,
or is this arrogance—
is this fire a god
that seeks me in the dark ?

III

I made image upon image for my use,
I made image upon image, for the grace
of Pallas was my flint
and my help was Hephaestos.²

² The Greek god of the forge.

I made god upon god
step from the cold rock,
I made the gods less than men
for I was a man and they my work.

And now what is it that has come to pass
for fire has shaken my hand,
my strivings are dust.

IV

Now what is it that has come to pass ?
Over my head, fire stands,
my marbles are alert.

Each of the gods, perfect,
cries out from a perfect throat:
you are useless,
no marble can bind me,
no stone suggest.

They have melted into the light
and I am desolate,
they have melted,
each from his plinth,
each one departs.

They have gone,
what agony can express my grief?

Each from his marble base
has stepped into the light
and my work is for naught.

VI

Now am I the power
that has made this fire
as of old I made the gods
start from the rocks--
am I the god
or does this fire carve me
for its use ?

Helen

1924

All Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the lustre as of olives
where she stands,
and the white hands.

All Greece reviles
the wan face when she smiles,
hating it deeper still
when it grows wan and white,
remembering past enchantments
and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,
the beauty of cool feet
and slenderest knees,
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

From *The Walls Do Not Fall*

1944

[15]

To be old to be useful
(whether in years of experience,

we are the same lot)
not old enough to be dead,

we are the keepers of the secret,
the carriers, the spinners

of the rare intangible thread
that binds all humanity

to ancient wisdom,
to antiquity;

our joy is unique, to us,
grape, knife, cup, wheat

are symbols in eternity,
and every concrete object

has abstract value, is timeless
in the dream parallel

whose relative sigil³ has not changed
since Nineveh and Babel.

[20]

Now it appears very clear
that the Holy Ghost,

childhood's mysterious enigma,
is the Dream;

the way of inspiration
is always open,

and open to everyone;
it acts as go-between, interpreter,

it explains the symbols of the past
in to-day's imagery,

it merges distance future
with the most distant antiquity,

states economically
in a simple dream-equation

the most profound philosophy,
discloses the alchemist's secret

and follows the Mage
in the desert.

³ Occult sign.

From *Tribute to the Angels*

1945

[38]

O yes—you understand, I say,
this is all most satisfactory,

but she wasn't hieratic, she wasn't frozen,
she wasn't very tall;

she is the Vestal⁴
from the days of Numa,⁵
she carries over the cult
of the *Bona Dea*,⁶

the pages, I imagine, are the blank pages
of the unwritten volume of the new;

all you say, is implicit,
all that and much more;

but she is not shut up in a cave
like a Sibyl,⁷ she is not

imprisoned in leaden bars
in a coloured window;

She is Psyche,⁸ the butterfly,
out of the cocoon.

[39]

But nearer than the Guardian Angel
or good Daemon,

she is the counter-coin-side
of primitive terror;

she is not-fear, she is not-war,
but she is no symbolic figure

⁴ Vestal virgins were Roman priestesses of Vesta, goddess of the hearth.

⁵ Mythological second king of Rome.

⁶ The Good Goddess was a Roman divinity whose festivals only women could attend. The Vestal Virgins led the ceremonies.

⁷ Oracle who lived forever, but was condemned by Apollo to age. She wasted away into dust.

⁸ Lover of Eros, the god of love, in Classical mythology.

of peace, charity, chastity, goodness,
faith, hope, reward;

she is not Justice with eyes
blindfolded like Love's;

I grant you the dove's symbolic purity,
I grant you her face was innocent

and immaculate and her veils
like the Lamb's bride,

but the Lamb was not with her,
either as Bridegroom or Child;

her attention is undivided,
we are her bridegroom and lamb;

her book is our book; written
or unwritten, its pages will reveal

a tale of a Fisherman,
a tale of a jar or jars,

the same—different—the same attributes,
different yet the same as before.