

A COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL POETRY

by

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CHAPTER I

AN ESSAY CONCERNING THE POEMS IN THIS VOLUME

In his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot asserts the impersonality of art. He argues, consequently, that the emotions of a poet are not on parade; that poems are not confessional, and that the true artist wants to escape his emotions in order to be able to transform them into art. Eliot, then, rejects the "romantic" conception of poetry in favor of one that combines both modern and classical elements. In "The Wasteland" for instance, Eliot makes the Greek prophet Tiresias a witness to the decay of love which Eliot sees occurring in twentieth-century London. Eliot also believes that poets should be scholars, working to make the intellectual pasts of different cultures a part of the craft of poetry, which, despite its dependence upon tradition, must remain new and vital. Because my view of poetry is similar to Eliot's, and since many of my poems are those in which a persona figures prominently, I acknowledge him as a major literary influence. Others to whom I owe a poetic debt are Edna St. Vincent Millay, Emily Dickinson, John Keats, William Morris, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

From Edna St. Vincent Millay, I have acquired a diction which combines the archaic and the contemporary. She has also given me a somberness of tone, a love for natural beauty, and a deep awareness of the fragility of human existence. From Emily Dickinson I have absorbed the power of the restrained understatement, which Miss Dickinson uses so well in her poem, "After Great Pain." Keats has bequeathed me a love of sensuous imagery, an awareness of the medieval past, and an appreciation of autumn. "Ode To Autumn," "The Eve of Saint Agnes," and "La Bel Dam Sans Merci" have influenced me particularly. Morris and Longfellow have shown me the importance of expert narration, and I am especially indebted to Longfellow's "Evangeline."

As Eliot's definition of poetry implies, poems are traditional in diction, subject matter, and source, a characteristic which describes accurately the poems in this volume. Both tone and vocabulary remain restrained and muted, even in poems which portray violent actions. A case in point occurs in "Persephone In Autumn," when, associating the harvest festivities with her imminent return to Hades, Persephone uses harvest imagery to imagine her impending ravishment. In "Potiphar's Lady Regards Her Existence," the calm delineation of the routine which Potiphar's wife is forced to follow only accentuates the lovelessness of her arranged marriage. Indeed, the decorum

of the girl during the wedding feast underscores the resentment beneath her passive demeanor. In "Judas Iscariot," the quiet manner in which Judas outlines his idealism makes his loss of it all the more believable. A disillusioned aristocrat, he finds the masses distinctly unappealing, and, given his lifestyle, he is not likely to be familiar with either "torn pockets," "gravel," or "hard cheese." Sources for my poems are varied, as indicated by the quotations preceding each work. They include not only the Old and New Testaments, but the Book of Common Prayer and Heloise's letters to Abelard, which I have read in translation. Other sources are, of course, Greek mythology, and scattered facts which I have gleaned from my reading of historical novels dealing with Biblical times and Sixteenth-Century England.

Besides believing that poetry ought to derive from tradition but not be synonymous with it, I, like Eliot, feel that any poet must somehow forge something personal from the scholastic past to which he is an heir. I view the persona poems as the result of my involvement with the Biblical and historical past. Like the author of Ecclesiastes, I, too, feel that there is virtually "nothing new under the sun,"--that all people in all cultures have suffered, conformed, and rejoiced in the prescriptive manner set out by those cultures, and that their struggles and

feelings are accessible and applicable to us. Heloise's battle with the flesh and the spirit is something which contemporary people can understand and the conformity of Potiphar's lady to the will of her family is not merely an event in the pre-Christian era. Although many of these characters are mentioned in history, history does not attempt, as I have done, to examine the motives behind the characters' actions, thus endowing otherwise insignificant people with human dignity and fallibility. In creating these characters, I have become more compassionate toward them, and have somehow made them a part of my existence. To me, Persephone is no mere legend to explain the coming of winter, but a terrified girl on the verge of insanity. Catherine of Aragon, likewise, is not just a rejected queen, but a dignified woman who welcomes death as one would a lover. Finally, Claudia, Pilate's wife, does not emerge as superstitious, but instead as merciful, empathetic, and sensitive.

While the persona poems recreate the historical past, three other poems are based on events in my own past: "Departure," "Elegy," and "Waiting At Yuletide." Even in these, though, the tone is reserved, and, while self-disclosure exists, there is about it an undeniable reticence. In "Tribute to G.," "Uncommitted," and "Golden Anniversary," I have modeled my characters on people I have known. The

color poems, "Green" and "Brown," and the seasonal and nature poems "Dawn," "Night," and the cycles portraying the months of the year are my attempts to visualize the world I have read about and experienced through hearing, smell, and touch. Many of these poems developed as visual exercises, games in imagery precision. Poems like "Maundy Thursday" and "To Sylvia Plath" are mood poems: that is, they try to capture in words a persistent and specialized feeling. Even in the second group of poems, I deal largely with the passing of time, as I consider seasons, events of the ecclesiastical year, and happenings from my own experience.

The poems collected here comprise what I believe to be the best of my writing. They stand as testament to the theory of poetry which I espouse: that poetry borrows from and molds tradition to make it into art; that writing persona poems compels the poet to be more objective, that is, nonpersonal; that a poet's past, while of secondary importance, is still a valuable poetic source, and that mood poems, though less ambitious than persona poems, encourage precision in imagery and therefore ought to be written. My poetry is a series of paradoxes. It is muted and violent; sensuous and controlled; unsparing yet forgiving. It praises the beauty of nature and of human nature but does not deny that greed, lust, pain, and

alienation also exist in the world; and, in this sense, my poetry is affirmative and is both traditional and contemporary. It is also, I hope, what the heroine of Tennessee Williams' story, "The Field of Blue Children," thinks poetry should be: ". . . a net to catch beauty in."

CHAPTER II

PERSONA POEMS

A Prioress in Limbo

Twelfth Night

A single bed
In a single cell;
A single cell
In an ancient house:
The barren granite,
Cold.
Under blankets I shiver
And listen to the wind,
While the mistress of novices,
Clicking her beads,
Dismisses her charges to prayers,
Or to virginal dreams.
They will lie alone
And think upon their vows,
Bonds to a bridegroom
Conceived by a maid,
And they, in their sleeping,
Will smile.
My crucifix clasped,
I remember your name,
Earthly magnificat.
My crucifix clasped,
I remember your name,

And scan the Confessions
Of Augustine.
The mistress of novices
Fingers her beads,
And the convent is quiet
With the rustle of saints.
In bed I toss,
My hot blood beating,
Recalling the orchard,
Ablaze with ripe fruit,
And the sweet, compelling scent
Of new-cut grass.
Outside, the sleet
Taps louder
At the pane.
The watchman's icy voice
Recites the hours.
I fling the blankets
To the granite floor,
Remembering May,
When we walked
Through green lace.
Tempted awake,
I abandoned my books
Your looks were daggers
Glinting in the light.
I strike the casement now
With trembling hands,
Railing at God,
While the chaste moon
Shrinks.

The Widow of Dives Laments

"The rich man died, and . . . was in great pain in Hades" (Luke 16:20-21).

I have stood all day in Athenian silk,
My olive eyes
Aching with unguent;
Pretended all day in Athenian silk,
Handing goblets to strangers
Who console
Out of duty:
The merchants
With oily concern
In their nods,
Their women in scarlet
And perfumed with myrrh.
The hall is quiet,
Like an empty purse,
And the maidens have left
With their wages
And sweethearts.
In the yard, a new beggar
Throws stones
At my door,
While the last rented mourner
Arranges his tie.
I have stood all day in Athenian silk,
Remembered the yellow leaves
Blowing in twilight.
Upon our bed he gave a weary cry.
I ran with scented cloths

And Grecian wine,
Speaking golden phrases,
Treasured twenty years.
Convulsed, he turned his head away,
And swore
At the sum
Of my dowry.

Potiphar's Lady Regards Her Existence

"And Joseph was a goodly person, and it came to pass . . . that his master's wife cast her eyes upon him" (Genesis 39:6-8).

My mother confided, when I was sixteen,
That marriage was lonely,
If one had wealth.
Nevertheless, she dressed me
In satin from Cairo,
And threaded my dark hair with sapphires.
In corners she talked manners with my nurse,
Who pursed her lips,
And prayed each day to Isis.
All this my father noticed,
Surveying me over his wine-glass;
Engaging an augur, who measured my beauty,
Appraising my height and the set of my jaw.
Through sifted leaves my future was surmised:
A balding Captain, gray at twenty-nine.
Even in Summer I shivered,
And looked at the ground.

I married in Autumn,
The lush fields blazing with newly ripe grain,
My mother in gold, and my father suffused with his pride.
Decorous, downcast, I sat at the feast,
Endured the greedy glances of my spouse;
Grew pale at the sight of the long tables laden with fruit.
I listened to chambermaids tipsy with wine,

And took silver trenchers from serving-men
Dizzy with lust.

Hasty advice from the arthritic nurse,
Slipping the lotus gown over my head--
Conjugal rights in the hot September dusk,
And then I lay, weeping, while Potiphar snored.

Judas Iscariot

My father was a scholar and knew Greek.
My mother wore scarlet and amethyst.
I pored over Sophocles,
Preferring Plato to prattling,
The Talmud to tennis,
And Diana, the scented Ionian slave,
With eyes like olives,
And hair like a winter's evening,
I sent to the kitchen.
The masses are rank,
Smelling of garlic and goats,
Bleating and bumbling
Like bats in the sunlight.
The wind burns,
A shrew with a terrible tongue.
My ideals are sherbet,
Served on a tarnished tray.
My torn pockets hold nothing
But gravel
And hard cheese.

Persephone In Autumn

I watch the servants working in the fields,
Their brown hands rich
With the just-gathered grain,
The maids with their bright hair
Unbound in the wind,
The young men swinging their scythes.
Women in yellow
Bring baskets of grapes
From the vineyard--
And on into darkness, the dancers continue,
Pressing out the wine.
At night on my bed I am weary,
But sleep, like the wild goose,
Flies.
I cry for my parents to hold me.
My mother's smile grows cold.
It seems I hear the demon
Call my name.
The savage wind assaults
The barren land.

Anne Boleyn

At thirty, I am thinning,
My eyes alight with frenzy,
And my red hair
Streaked with gray.
I stand at the mirror,
Examine my complexion,
And wait
For the turn
Of the key
In the lock.
Henry comes in the evening.
I am agile,
Engaging.
Over cards, we remember
The Spanish
Princess.
I spill the goblet,
Brimming with new wine.
The darkness
Descends.
When he goes, I stand
At the mirror,
Examining my complexion.
The dawn comes,
Cloudy,
A silent hearse
On the gently sleeping
Street.

Catherine of Aragon

A hopeful suitor,
Death arrives with flowers.
He stands, importunate,
Outside the door.
I have relinquished my crown
And my cases of jewels;
I have dressed in dignity,
Like a silken negligee.
Confessions rise
Like lovers' vows,
Cologne mist.
Celibate snow on celibate ground;
Celibate snow on shivering trees.
The anesthetist smiles,
Snapping my train.
The Mother Superior
Fastens my veil.
Friar Francisco hurries
Toward the door.

Claudia

"And when he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, "Have . . . nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things . . . in a dream because of him" (Matthew 27:19).

Pontius tosses,
His dreams like the fragments
Of my decayed wedding dress,
With its one lace rose
Clinging staunchly to the bodice.
When he wakes, I will pour wine,
Give him a washcloth,
Summon the gnarled, sun-beaten soothsayer,
Speaking soothingly and sensibly about Caesar.
I, too, have dreamed,
Learned to shut out violence,
Pushing the urchins away from my skirts,
And taking ammonia to the arena.
Dawn bursts on the world,
Flaming, fluorescent
Ignoring the juggling
Of justice and copper.
The governor stirs;
A rooster crows,
And tulips, attentive,
Collapse like dead soldiers.
My mirror splinters.
The twang of a bow-string
Dies in the sultry air,
Mixed with the odor
Of jasmine and charcoal.

The Two Marys

I

"All ye works of the Lord, bless God" (translated from the Book of Common Prayer).

I first noticed you in the carpenter's shop,
Gray-haired,
With kindly eyes,
Sawing lumber for tables,
And smelling of varnish and sweat.
You looked at me quickly,
Inquiring my business,
Going quietly back to your work
When I left.
When you spoke to my father,
I shivered in bed,
Hearing your voices,
Like cool desert nights,
And wanting to talk to my mother.
Now I am used to your smile,
And the sound
Of your hammer,
Your coming at evening
To speak with my parents,
Your warm eyes fastened on me
As I measure out
Barley.
Today I felt a queasiness at dawn,
And stumbled in my walking
From the well.
So tonight I am coming

To tell you,
 Coming dressed in azure,
 And my hair sedately
 Bound.

I am afraid of the flint
 In your eyes,
 The sudden, stony silence
 Of your scorn.

Above, the stars
 Are plumes of beckoning fire.
 The wolves are Hagar,
 Weeping in the night

II

"If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is, . . . and what a bad name she has" (Luke 7:39).

My mother was weeping
 When I left the house,
 Raising her voice
 In hysterical Hebrew grief,
 Bewailing my memory,
 As well as my misdeeds--
 And I have never been back.
 My first lover, Flavius,
 Hired a tutor
 Who taught me to read.
 Skeptical, scented,
 I linger in bed
 Till eleven,

Remembering classical vergs.
 At two, I see Quintus,
 Unless we have quarreled,
 And then, I see others.
 Sapphic odes in the evening.
 I practice my lute,
 And Miriam
 Combs out my hair.
 Dining with Pilate,
 I applaud Persian dancers,
 Hear heady garden gossip,
 Inhaling the fragrance
 Of full-blown hibiscus.
 At twelve, I sip pomegranate wine,
 And listen to the raucous cries
 Of camels in the street.

III

"Near the cross stood his mother . . . and Mary of Magdala" (John 19:25).

At forty-eight,
 My hands rough
 With the grain I have ground,
 I have borne all my children.
 My first, my eldest boy,
 Was strange,
 Gentle, a rugged cedar,
 Attentive at temple,
 His words like the snapping
 of cords.

Today I saw him led in purple through the crowds,
Reeling with garlic and blood.

She stood beside me,
In ruffled, amethyst gown,
Her eyes dropping unguent,
Her jeweled fingers
Clenched.

Then Quintus, the officer,
Brought the thistled crown,
Ignoring the woman
Who clutched
At his elbow.

The air was bright with heat
And dicers' oaths.

I fainted when the spear-thrust
Pierced his side,
And wakened at dawn
In a room
Cold with moonbeams
And doubt.

CHAPTER III

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

Uncommitted

The bachelor sits on his side of the table,
Tasting the wine,
And wondering
Where the butter
Could be.
Avoiding her eyes,
He saddles out salad,
Staring for a moment too long
At the red, ripe tomato.
He touches his glass,
And thinks of his heartbeat.
The lady remains silent.

Waiting at Yuletide

For My Sister

Our house is quiet
With the hover of death
Brooding like poplars.
Our house is rank
With the odor of death
Cloying like musk.
On the table, a puzzle,
Parading its fragments,
Exposes our hearts.
In bed I read history,
Betting on Bothwell,
While my mother embroiders.
The drooping parlor Christmas tree
Sags with the sinking barometer.

Departure

Sunday at eight. You stand with your camera,
Coaxing my smile.
I am dressed in brown,
And the wind is cold.
Under the awning, I shake
And remember my gloves.
Inside, we are formal,
Conversing of forecasts;
Our voices are vibrant
With unsaid intent.
I glance at the teapot
And wonder if there would be time.
The calendar looms:
Your eyes scan the clock.
Our embrace has the fragrance of cloves
And the length of a year.

Forsaken

In a windowless room, the girl practices Chopin,
Counting her notes
As one collecting rent,
Heeding neither the dog at her door,
Nor the dirtless terrarium
On the dusty shelf.
The Polonaise over,
She shuts the door,
Turning about idly
On the squeaky, rotating stool.

Elegy

Five years is an age to remember
The stench of the seaweed,
The strength
Of sunburned arms,
Our walk on the seashore
Where six-year-olds
Scribbled their names--
But now the tourists have folded
Their tents,
Collected their baskets
And cameras.
Pelicans swoop on the windy beach,
Searching for remnants
Of crumbs.

Because of You

Because of you, I give my heart by inches,
The measured estimation
Of a kiss.

Because of you, I gather fruit sedately,
Pressing the firmness
Of oranges,
Calculating green
And ripe bananas,
Balancing a penny
On my thumb,
Looking at both sides.

Because of you, I give my heart by inches,
I grasp an oak and guess
About its strength,
A wary landlord measuring intent.

Because of you, I barter out my heart,
And sulk about the lack of guarantees.

Isolation

Stretches on sand on a wide, wild beach;
Rock-points glint on the ocean floor.
The gypsy pair
In a borrowed car
Clutch in awkward agreement.
The lone mute ambles,
Looks at the sea,
Then frowns as he fingers
His few collected coins.

Us

Over coffee and croutons,
We chatter politely,
Discussing the weather,
The length of the winter,
And whether your plants
Will survive
The next snow.
We talk about Strindberg,
The Strauses,
Stravinsky,
Of Kathy and Kenneth,
Of roses and recipes.
The years lie between us,
A saber cloaked in velvet,
Like the night.

Maundy Thursday

Rain drips,
The incessant clanging of amateur guitars,
Jangling.
A faded girl
On a crumbling porch
Gives pressed ham sandwiches
To a man in torn jeans.
In the swing, an old man
Glues his eyes to the jug,
Half-full of grape wine.
The circling of buzzards
Sends kittens under the house.

Ash Wednesday

Steeped in dust, the dry earth waits;
Cloaked in dusk, the parched church prays,
Hearing the shouts
Of singers in the streets,
The lithe, sweet lutes,
And the carnival rapture
Of carefree, carnivorous crowds--
Regretting the prince
Who must travel
In sorrow and amethyst.
Wrapped in dusk, the dry church mourns,
The bride having hidden her bracelets,
Awaiting the cleansing
Of wine,
And the penitent rain.

Advent

The world in chrysalis,
Quiet, expectant,
Tenses toward waking.
Solicitous salesmen
Reek Allspice and coffee,
Adjusting painted managers.
The two months' bride
In butterfly robe
Turns tinted pancakes,
While Gregorian chants,
Like celibate snow,
Compete with the crying
Of crows.

Your Letter

Your letter comes, a shooting star,
Disrupting the lazy languor
Of academic nights
With Shelley and Shakespeare.
Your sentences hurt,
Stretch my credibility,
A tattered, too-short tent-top.
They are furry caterpillars
Crawling up my arm,
Making cocoons of my intelligence;
Problematic equations
Jangling like college chimes
Played by an amateur.
Stepping from the closet, you show my picture
To curious college cronies.
Illogical, enigmatic,
I'm not supposed to notice
It's Indian summer,
Or observe that chatting chickadees
Fly south.

Green

Diminutive, delicate,
Graceful in gingham,
Green glides down the wide marble stairs.
Tranquil, tempestuous,
Modeling sherbert composure,
She sways in her grass-colored shoes.

Brown

Shivering easily,
Brown knits by the fire,
Delighting in patterns
Decreased twenty years.
Circumspect, sober,
Fast nearing forty,
Condemning all flirting
As fatuous, frantic,
She reads Wuthering Heights,
The Maid of Lorraine,
And compliments Liszt
On his pink disregard
For decorum.

Dawn

In amethyst gown,
She unpins yellow braids,
With cool, perfumed hands.

Night

Lithe as a leopard,
Tawny in taffeta,
Night does the samba
To Kottke's guitar.
Persistent cicadas
In tambourine chorus
Accompany fireflies,
Crescendos of lantern
And sound.

January

An old cavalier
Sways toward reveling guests,
Juggling wine and fruitcake.

February

Timid, triumphant,
Holding half-grown hyacinths,
She makes her debut.

March

Shrieking invectives,
Cursing unruly ringlets,
She hurls gilded glass.

April

In garments of green,
Bewailing her beloved,
She weeps him into war.

May

In plum petticoats,
May murmurs scented raptures,
Red lips riotous.

June

Nipping her needlework,
Lady Capulet listens
To Wall Street,
Arranges ambition
To meet with expense,
Discounting the laughter
Of lovers
On lush summer lawns.

April

In heels and hyacinths,
April attends the opera,
Dancing, dew-like,
From the barely stopped cab.
Onstage, Isolde
Rains rage and remorse,
While betrayal
Blossoms.
Knotting floral kerchief,
April dabs
At her eyes,
Then glides sedately
Into the moon-splashed night.

Expectation

Cold, the carolers crouch by the fire,
Warming frostbitten fingers.
Their voices rise
With the scent of newly mulled wine.
A wintered bard
With a weathered cane
Sings of Shallot,
Of Gawain and Glendour,
While the cups are filled
And the rustle of caps subsides.

Making

Shaping impressions
Until they are images,
The poet kneads
His bread.

To Sylvia Plath

Intruding, contradicting,
Your poems astound me,
Glinting like razors
Deliberately left on the carpet.
Careless, controlled,
They unhinge attic trunks,
Dusty with centuries.
The window's brocade you wear to the beach--
It's cider for breakfast
And brandy for four o'clock tea.
You bring no card when you call at the office,
Leave wax on the dresser,
And perfume on the piano--
Defying routine with a nod.

Tribute to G.

We took you into twilight,
With your cane,
And your pail
For tobacco,
Your myths of Reconstruction,
And your tales
Of ten-penny bread.
Cajoled into twilight,
Tolerant, tender,
Showing surprise
At our hiding in arbors,
It seemed you held the haunted night at bay,
Prolonging the vespers
Of sparrows in the brush.

Golden Anniversary

She

Seventy-five, scented,
Buxom, bewitching,
Saluting her guests
With a girlish guffaw,
She thinks of the snow,
And the birth
Of a ten-pound tyrant,
Remembers her schoolroom,
Where children chimed Cicero,
And the garnet voice
Of a gallant man,
Daring her to waltz.

Months On Parade

January

A gray monk
With a grizzled face
Chops chunks of wood
For a flickering fireplace,
Coughing dryly in a paper-thin house.
The wind shrieks,
While the scent of stale myrrh
Rises with drunken laughter
From next-door apartments.

February

Coy, temperamental,
She buys new perfumes daily,
Tempting spring.
Her boots, Spanish leather and nails,
Scrape the pavement,
Gathering snowflakes.
Coaxing crocuses,
Flirting with fireflies,
Shoving flowers underground,
Like unstrung brats.
Willful, willowy,
She pastes flags on her dresses,
Saucily stamping Valentines.

March

Anne Boleyn, masquerading at balls,
March is erratic.
She storms the executive's heart
With Windsong and chocolates,
Discusses Descartes in a booming contralto,
And changes her mind when he simpers,
Putting a peppermint into her mouth.
Her silence becomes like a schoolgirl's.

April

Dew-like, delicate,
April writes her analysis,
Batting her eyes like blotches
As she erases.
In the hall she demures,
Puts her hat on the table,
And then on her head,
Remembering where she is going.

May

Mild and mothering,
May consoles,
Leaving baskets for the poor,
And schoolbooks for janitors.
Like crème de menthe
Her voice soothes strident children,
Aiming rocks at the shivering doves.

June

In her diary she calculates dowries,
 Reaching over absently to straighten plastic chrysanthemums.
 Nervous lovers, giggling on park benches,
 Notice her beady eyes,
 Remembering Lady Capulet.
 On her clothesline, a mockingbird sways dangerously.
 In the south, the dark clouds gather,
 While perfumed widows
 Nestle under umbrellas.

July

A housewife reading Strindberg,
 She takes quick dips in the back yard pool,
 Curls up on a quilt
 To nibble nuts and chocolates.
 Disliking dishes, she clutters the house,
 Studies tourist tracts of the Riviera,
 And jangles her car keys.
 Misty and sequined,
 She smiles at her six o'clock husband,
 Building his boat on the front lawn.

August

Seven attendants fan her.
 Yawning languorously,
 August, luxuriant,
 Flashes ivory teeth,

Knots her hair in French fashion,
And lauds Latin verbs
In her versatile Welsh lilt.
She touches the lute by her bedside,
Her mind alive with memories
From another age.

September

A curvaceous abbess,
She sips mint julip,
Munches sugary pralines,
Smiling covertly
At the shy Sagittarian priest.
In bed she reads Swinburne,
Throbbing, enthralling,
While the wild swans call softly
To the crisp, brown leaves.

October

Wizened and wild, she stalks the earth,
Her voice like the wail
Of untuned guitar strings.
Chanting in graveyards,
She rustles the grass,
Mingles her spells
With the whines of scurrying hounds.

November

Hannah is barren,
With the stark, severe beauty
Of the most severe vestal.
Canning and crooning,
She charms neighbors' children
To her door,
And gives them sugared biscuits.
Undressed, the tree trunks
Lie in the lashing wind.

December

A perfumed grandmother,
December gives orders,
Lies back on velvet cushions,
Exuding fragrance,
An awesome geranium.
About her, unbehaved fiddles complain,
Then whine,
Encores after dessert.
Women tipsy with wassail
Waltz through the galliard,
Their beads like the jangling
Of love and jealousy.