Spring 5-19-1952

Wreath and Crystalis: Twenty-Two Poems and an Experiment

William A. McQueen

McQUEEN — WREATH AND CHRYSALIS

WREATH AND CHRYSALIS:

Twenty-two Poems and an Experiment

By

William A. McQueen

A Creative Thesis

In partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

The University of New Mexico
1952

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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DATE

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Thesis committee

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Elegy:
At My Father's Grave

No tears are shed for him.

No tears are shed:

An inauspicious slab,

Marbled, with a name

Magic once to many ears,

And sweet to all.

Now silence,

A plot of grass

All want only to forget.

Tears, perhaps, are shed for him,

But not here.

Thoughts are thought, perhaps, of him

But not--not here.

Laughter, so innate with him,

Has no place here they say.

And all seek laughter for reprieve,

And stay away.

He lies in loneliness,

No tree, no bird, no softness here,

Only hard, square lines,

Death solitaire, and replete with him.

I could say he lives—
In men's hearts;
But what are men or hearts,
Before this actuality of stone,
And loneliness?
Death in all finality
Lies upon his chest.

Perhaps, though, perhaps one comes
Sometimes to ponder incredulous,
At the deep simplicity of a date,
And of a name,
And listen to graveyard laughter
Of a little fame.
And it would be enough
If one came here to weep,
For any cause.
This harshness would complement the fact.

And here, I think, lies myself that was,
Dry chrysalis,
And here, too, if anywhere it lies,
Lies truth.

Inebriate: A Face

Is it you, swaying, ready to fall,
With eyes, urgent in a melted face
Screaming all the world's disgrace,
Asking reason for all
This world's drunkenness
And fragile emptiness?

No. Your face has broken, run
Down your vest. You are sleeping
While secret, world-lost hands are reaping
Your eyes, like ripe fruit, and in their place
A fury is whirl-winding borne,
Lost in nothingness,
Writhing soul's distress
As we stand and watch you, forlorn.

For a moment you blaze like a furious sun,
The center of our rage, with fear,
Like delicate brown dust, blown clear,
And sobriety undone.

But it is not you
—Only a plastic face
Left carelessly floating, journeying to
A far, lost place.

In the Cemetery at Honoraville

In the cemetery at Honoraville
Mama Turner lies,
And in far-off Frisco her youngest cries
"Mama, Mama" and strokes young boys' thighs,
Between absolutions of art
And vanity vainly imbibed.

Behind the church at Honoraville
There is peace and quiet,
And a bird sings down by the branch
Where violets grow;
And the cotton is dead,
A dry skeleton on brown, bare hills,
But will bloom again in white fertility
After summer's wind
Sings across white tombs
Behind the church.

But spring and hell doubly reign
In Frisco and in the heart
Seeking beauty above the bay,
Playing woman to himself and young men's knees,
Wishing for a womb.

Mama Turner lies ample in quietness

--That one son is married,

A million miles across the bay,

Censuring one who paints his heart in twisted hues

On crumbling cubes of desire,

Does not change a tremulous shadow

Or smile upon a face at rest,

Though the wind call across the fields:

"Mama! Mama, I've lost my world!"

Or: "Mama! Is my heart my own?"

An Orange of Hope

Green is gone.

Brutal, fated gold and here:

Winds south, southern waves

Blaze blue and warm

In a frigid time,

Soft, sand and sky,

Wings white,

High a sibilance

An augury.

Yet only sheened, acrid

Sphere, lumped and porous

Gold, plashed

With juice; pregnance.

A circled breast,

Orange and harlequined.

Beauty: Foreign. Almost paint,

Globed linoleum.

Lost, loose umbilicals.

What seed become,

Or thought

Or hue

And die,

Black Octobering

Down

(No death).

Bright all shelled, sweet in secure, now

More than space,

A flare of mind

Till unthought worms are dust,

A golden, gleaming O.

The Automatic Elevator

The button punched--an automatic
Calm. Then irritant, and punch.
Listen then, and push
A staccato, impatient thumb,
And wait
For the deus ex machine
To come bear skyward
Some stories more
--Ponder what gods or men
Might come stepping earthward
With what strange auguring
And viable thought
From no scholar's pathetic,
Fractured tongue; but clear,
Marbled-domed and consonant.
Subjunctively annihilate
An obdurate door and soar.

But machines click impassively
An ordered orbitant. So wait
Until final whirr and there--
A deep, hesitant door;
Open and--emptily

Only stare:

On cubed insolence

A mechanic emptiness.

But buttons presage

At least tentative flight

And, Whee—

Push and ride

A rheumatic pegasus

Through angular skies.

Kicking heels at books;

Riding for the roof.

Conceivable Yes this not all,
This atom-world spinning on
An egocentric thumb an atom in
An atom in
An infinite, no end.

"Man is God?" poor fool
Within a whirling cell, practical
Fool perhaps, ants within
An antic atom can only pin
Their world upon a dream:

Our ants of promise, dots within
A spaced and spinning ball invisible,
Poor guts in head another,
Only world, the fantasy of hope,
Like fish, dancing bowls,

The bright diminutives.

Ed, you cracked a starry whip
At Santa Fe upon the black
And shallow hills,
Showed the grip, motion, swing
And flashed explosive tongue
Upon the night, your instrument.

Whipped a tongue upon
The mirrored black, swung a throng
Of stars, a world upon your arm
And left its lashes on the night
Sobbing silver hills,
Our flesh's poor thumb.

I swung and flubbed your scourge,
Your ebon tongue, could talk no life
Nor death, and came to this:
A wonderer. Lie quiet.
Your slitted eye and bullwhip tongue
Carve the wind at Santa Fe.

The Green Lady

The green lady comes screaming home,
Her hair aflame, a tiger's eye,
And all the platitudes. Our lady Spring
Clings again to dirt, a pregnant hope,

And shouts through lips to us the feminine,
The cataclysmic womb, her green rein
On lips and hands, upon the ear
Her old song, and green anatomy

Embraces rocks, weeping green the dust
Of bones, of love, and thighs of spring.

Stormy Weather

I, too, am windy sky,
Stormy self upon the rocks;
The doll of gleaming streets,
Glistening, crying beauty's bright
Icicle in the rain.

The agony of tree black harps,
And rain's white tear
On leaf and chalk, skeletons,
A sodden bird with copper in his claws
This lost wet day, seeking love.

The wind's wet scream upon a drain,
A sobbing self and hollow eye;
All the world I cry, with teeth,
My empty-journeyed love,
Leaking down a drain.

Burial

I hope the leaves are falling that day,
With, perhaps, a soft far-flung rain
Misting down, sodden birds, and stain
Of red still in ancient clay.

Only a single rose in pain
Beyond a fallen stone, flushed
With transience. Nothing hushed:
Slow-dripping rain, sharp coughs, wind's refrain.

Clouds flying low; a circular show
Of mortality about a hungry hole.
(Poor tears' futility, shedding souls
Amidst the rain.) Thus to go

Final in disdain
A leaf, a mocking bird,
A poem unheard
My weepers in the rain.

Communication

Shut within each fictive cell,
Chanting no one melodious dirges
--You still trail entrails to the world
Through furtive keyholes, and hold
Desperate chaos to your breast,
Know no rest, chained by guts
To communal earth; caressing a lonely doom
Within each secret, self-filled room.

Doorbells ring. (Even) knocks are heard
Muffled in your twilight air,
Outsung by books, undone by words
(Myriad-tongues, time-raped lands)
Borne, broken, off by outside air,
Yet echoed, echoed, thresholded there.
Until you frantically unleash,
Clumsily reach:

And find your hands cut off.
Tongues left that cannot say; eyes that see
Overmuch. And cry I meant I meant
And then
Grow silent,
Silent.
Silent.

Cemetery: Tamarisks in Spring

Angered, ragged, amber-stumped,
Ungreen, cemeterial trees,
Crenellating a whitest wall,
Warp dead importunance
From plots of living tombs.

Filagreed of gloom
On curded skies, tamarisks
Explode a scraggly rhetoric
Of certitude
On spring's green insolence.

Before Choosing

In this window height flash white
    Myriad, argus-eyed,
Spheres unorbited. This huge

I stand astride Mildendo
    Almost, my hands, within
A string of jewels: white-danced dark

Like white ant's glass, winking up the west
    From the ruptured heart of black
Where red raves, neon broods, and white.

A million dots are life, worlds
    Manifold, and all I cannot have,
All. Must choose

One glass,
    Beneath massing darks, tear,
To circumscribe a heart.

Crush my Gulliver to one
    World of light, one globe, say,
Pushing shadows down a stair,

Rose carpeted, toward dark boundary:

A midnight mouse, a key, calendar,

Room within a box, the same old dolls:

Far laughters, dark beyonds,

Calling feet of stone

In a filtered stream.

These pearls, world,

One perilous

Price.

Poet in the Ranks

All too prodigal hope,
How can he hope to know
In this year's too violent meandering
A soft and civil thought

Who should have been
The gaudiest leaf on brilliant winds,
Or soft sigh of summer moon
On blue fantastic pines, or smooth and
Pebble where the river winds crystalline
Peace.
—But never this
Steel-jagged blood and unmythical gut
On immolated earth,
And Circean filth.

—Unless he sing
A scyther's song of whitest innocence
From spring's bludgeoning throes,
And sign his life's whitest blood
Upon the crimson faith
Of a wounded rose.

A Hope of Bones

My dog, my coursing bones, my tongue,
My long soul's paradigm
Upon the stormy trail,
The end is known, but whisper none,
Your teeth against an ear.
Bound, bound, my panting clown,
Gnash each crystal breath
With kiss of bone, of death.

Trail your prey, my fugitive,
The world around a tear,
Over stone and down
Green intensity, race on,
Bay my word to me my word
My hope, and wash my fear
Upon your tongue, my howling hound.

A Ship of Dreams

My dog, my unreading bones, my tongue,
My long soul's parchment
Upon the stormy trail,
The end is known, but whisper none,
Your teeth explain no war.
Bound, bound, my setting claws,
Dance each crystal breath
With kiss of love, of death.

Trail your mast, my fugitive,
The world crowed a tear,
Over stars and dust
Green intensity, run on.
Say my word to me my word
My hope, and wash my fear
Upon your tongue, my beating bread.

Chagrin, My Lady

We have deeper bonds than you guess.
Nothing, nothing in common? Oh, yes.
That bright hair shall grace a silken casket,
And my sigh commemorate corruption.

But do not cry.

Seeking the worm in wax fruit's perfection,
I found none. Beauties of a silver basket
Do not die, being dead. Their frigid grace
Is smooth and clear, enjoyed not for taste.

Rush Hour

All the beautiful women sweep the street
In glass-bright glitter
On frail, five o'clock odyssey
To love, or hope, or death
In sharp wind-swept loveliness.
Martial, close corseted,
Armored in our mirrored eyes,
Guiding fragile threads
Of self, vermillion hued,
Through steel-clogged tides,
Beauties, burnished bright, colours
To the wind, charge a life,
Run brief loneliness
In inertias of their defeat,
Bravuras of transience.

The Gaol of Hope

Fingernails, melting bones and morning breath,
Dark of breasts and walking guts, soles alone
Touching earth, the pregnant roots, hair
Soft, ridiculous, an angry penis
Waving self footprinted down a year:
Yet spring within the head, through eyes
And tongue, nose and channeled ear,
The hand's itinerary--under vault of bone,
Soft, from time's chicanery--which hammered words
Must forge the world, a chain
To reel the skull down to mouldering
And back again, to stricken flesh singing still.

A Plaster Helen

Eyes, teeth, and cigarettes (I have tried
To write you down), china bits of wit
Over cups of black:
                Your cellophane face,
Brambled hair, jewel at your throat,
And words on limbs
Of flesh,
The cloth sophistry.
                Put no kiss red
On porcelain, synthetic words
At me, tilting cigarettes, nor eye
Me greyly to midgetry
From flagpole emptiness.
Hang your plastic breasts,
And close narcisstic eyes, I
    shall
            not
                climb
Down to you
(Upon my
Self).

Death, I am always burying you,
Flashing breath like spades
Over my ignominy,
A lover in the shrouds.

Tonight I shoveled the dog, poisoned,
Down, with simple stroke of hands,
Shattered, by shafted lantern light,
To a closing hole: fur

And earth, an innocent affair.
In roots of tamarisk
His quiet teeth lie now.
And all was quick,

Was quick, quick flesh;
But I, a fool of monuments,
Go celebrating wounds
That need no ornament but dirt:

Cannot die like dogs;
Webbed with puissant self,
Miss the final grace
Of such simplicity.

Aside to Ed

Inadequate, still alien,
I go
To the class attended
A year ago,
Amended by your
Precisioned ghost.
You said,
"Write down the words,"
I did not,
"To remember,"
And I said
I would write no elegy
To your rational pain.
Beauty was an equation,
Solution merely equal death.
And life's obvious,
Aching arithmetic
A razored metaphysic
To slit a
You have measured down
Your life
In most calm oblation
To cerebral death,

Reeled a steel umbilical
Gestured with no tears,
Only circling crystalline
Spheres of time
In spaceless finity,
Minds of us:
Obituaries of a self
Dream bred, yet
Unfantastic,
Sharp broken glass and
Untender years.

And speed with no excuse
For oblivion, death's iconoclast;
The lectern writhing
Professor says
(I write to remember)
A pedagogic lust,
Faint and infinite,
So meticulous.
Accept this empty seat
As no elegy
Of mine,
And no farewell.

Swelled a great vanilla
Centered with no excuse,
Only climbing upwardness
Spurns of time
In speechless fidelity,
Blade of ox,
Obliterting of a self
Dream head, yet
Unfaithfully,
Blurs broken glass and
Unbreaker years.

And speed with no excuse
For oblivion, death's lamentant:
The lonesome whistling
Professor says
(I wish to remember)
A pedagogic lark,
Rules and infinite,
So matchless.
Accept this empty seat
As my elegy
Of mine,
And no farewell.

Another Kind

He deep lived, pain fleshed
Until handed death's clean skull;
Grasped its rotten eyeball
Hard and smiled, not even then
Kissing its loveless face,
Walked a red hall through death
With deepening eyes to welt the dark
As brutal sunlight, angrily dying,
Inflected a final dominance
Of red: blood, love, and galloping sun,
Bruising to fatal black.

Within his ebbing flesh
Grown avidly cancerous,
Lived his waning, traitorous breath,
Hating with all fading light
The lovely dark;
Closed with steep and lusting pain,
Loved death and would not die:
Wondrous granite tears
And mirth from agonies,
Vanishing, a sort of truth,
Undead.

A Kind of Odyssey

"Yet forth you stride: yourself the way, the goal."

—Roy Campbell

Taste of pinto beans, homely, enduring, with a sting of green peppers. Man sitting on my left, a black hat. Slouched like a frog, waiting for anything. Sitting hat still on, hunched elbows, surveying two empty feet. Milk. Man on my right is staring. I won't. Look at him instead. Caught, he looks away. Saturday night, the week catches up. Doldrums, and grey infinity to Sunday morning. And what am I going. A new waitress, bad complexion but young and insolent breasts. Her hair is tangled as if she had just rolled out of bed. Nice smile and eyes, but too-smooth unconcern. Has not the necessary tragic air, could not take my heart and slap it with indignation. Has not the darkness I need to say, unraveling these wounds do not bleed, kiss them closed again. Remembering the tragic face of the actress, grief, and the softer one of Joan more like this.

—May I have my check, please? Oh, oh, she broke her pencil. Fumble.

—Here, take mine.

—What?

—My pencil, take it if you need it.

—Oh, thank you. A smiling question, What are you? Concerned with the check now. Yes, much like Joan, only she doesn't love me. Neither do I Joan either, remember. Smile. Young, young.

—Goodnight.

Curious machines. Malevolent. Computers of our lives. I have lived...how many green licenses. A dirty rubber pad for the change. Thank you. Goodnight. Goodnight.

It's cold out, would be vicious without the lights. The warmth of lights. A Budweiser sign—I was there last week. Seeker of tabernacles...glass altars, the polished sanctum, mahogony tears and cigarettes. They dragged remember Hubert de Burgh from Devizes Church and had to put him back, order of the king. They will not get me there. Friends with the glowing innards, barmaids and white-shirted, teeth-faced votaries. Sanctuary. They will not even criminals, unwritten law. A man must not be taken at drink. And afterward he does not care. A drunken-faced braggart with an empty liver runs the lower depths, shouting through mud to wheels Nothing I want nothing. I will go to the Great, soft-lighted, Western where no winds blow and no. Gods come. Great gold-plated bar, shadows whisper in the corner. Not wanting your golden fuel, I come. And throw my hat away. Home is a mystery.

—Oh, thank you. A smiling question, then, to your con-
cerned with the death row. Yes, even the Jews, only they do not
love me. Nothing do I love either, remember. Smile, Yes,
young.

—Goodnight.

Curious manners. Schoolboy. Everyone of our times. I have
lived...too many great illnesses. A dirty rubber sea for the strong.
Thank you. Dr. Lacan. Goodnight.

It's cold out, mild & windy without the lights. The
wards in lights. A graduate night—I saw him last week. Doctor
of Tomorrow...Nine albers, the million: sandwiches, coffee, beer
and cigarettes. Your Gregory reading—Robert de Brunh from Brunhe
Church and had to put the book, order or ashtray. They will not
get me there. Fakers with the glowing Gnosis, Dunwich and
white-shirted, textbook-read vestiles. Scientists. They will not
even ordinarily, unwritten law. A man must not be taken at trial.
And afterward he does not care. A drunken-faced bungard with an
empty liver runs the Inner Circle, shouting through me to whole
nothing I want nothing. I will go to the coast, soft-lighted, where
there no whole filer and sea. Dark room. Great yellow-plated bar,
shadows indigo in the corner. Not anything your golden fall, I cry
and throw my hat down. Time is a traveler.

He said the old guy under the sign of Bud through glasses and a felt hat, "I buried Mary last week" and I said "Nothing." Who the hell is Mary? She had a red nose, he said, a rag of hair. I do not care, will not weep. Look, I laugh. Through hell like a mole, the other side is China. And rise triumphant, resurrecting worms. He said, "A good woman. We lived fifteen years, too old to marry. She understood she understood. Another drink. Even if she did buy beer for insurance. None. Frailty of the heart, she morning the wind on stale cabbages, and came religiously to bite her glass. With eyes like barking dogs, or tired acrobats. Old rituals, Mary and me. She burned to death, last week, with time." I am burning now, now. And preserve in alcohol, persevere in breath. Laugh your red nose in hell, Mary. You are just, and my brother.

And down the street, down the--street. Cold night. All the huddled, foolish lights. One red eye screams. I stop. Beggar at a cross of horns and eyes. The quandary of a cross. Remembering the nights. Sea-booms at dark Capistrano, the swallow gone. Moon-gorged Oregon. The windy plains of Hobbs and oil flares: outposts, ignorant, I took no Rhesos' horses, but watched the stars. Flew toward them even in the droning planes and found no nearer. Saturday Dallas with my hurrying through its warm; lovers' giggles on porches dark beyond the light I stood. Buses, going from their girls. Lonely drivers, droners. The metallic lights, and all my

drunken Lorelei. Music to thigh. The low insinuates. I have no and quick my--goodbye. Goodbyegoodbye. Total black, and far cold lights whirring, curving toward existence; mechanic lights bearing hope through zeroed night toward my spot of black. Cold dark.

And now the green.

--Pardon me mister. Where is that Salvation Army?

A pack on his back. Beard, gentle voice. Seeker, traveler dirty feet across the night? Remember a night in white Utah with only a cold silver moon and one asphalt umbilical going back to nowhere, a dog baying alien.

This brother too, suppliant to his cross. Tell him. Two blocks south and over the bridge. Across the bright under green between the moment-poised machines of all their souls he goes. Unchromed under trees, receding toward no room his own. Oh traveler, there beats too beneath. Alien. Seeking that star immutable, cornerstone for hope, before the worm. That reflected self in all where home the traveler. Home.

Threadbare down the street, strict loneliness. Toward salvation. I stood the windy crossroads to show the way signposts cannot move. A cigarette smouldering by a leaf, I step and walk, leaving crosses at their point: a luxury I can afford, the sanctuary no longer bars, but wind. We pass secretly, And.

Yet. A golden leaf is beautiful.

Can one retread a living laminated map, of time, scrape it to the bone and mould all hope to home. How can I tell myself red clay is pine is brutal spring is yellow creek, crow croak, winding paths is sandy night is bled and wailing autumn not me?

The trains go fast under the viaduct. Screaming loneliness. Still some in steel assuagement. Walking past the Venetian, Bowery, Jack's, wet laughter, tin strategems. Toward the land's long enveloping. A rape of miles, on steel adorations. Farewell and loves, sending rage to dissipate on endless miles, whirling iron. The still virginal land, inviolate, holds this mirrored mind. Endures. Bears my heart to only blistered ant-crawled tracks. The cactus thorn; a mooned splash, indefinite. Heights of dirt, granite heaving at the sky; and smell of sand. My narcissistic peace, or God, untranslated on this bridge, me-on self: myself all unuttered. Unsatisfied.

The bridge now. Going nowhere with pregnant self, this viaduct. Below all lights, reflecting stars, worlds. This night after nights unfolding the uncontiguous self, the only home. Chaotic minutes, seeking through disjunctive flesh. This poor flesh-funnel crying Oh, oh, spindled on a breath, enduring integrity. And this. Rough upon the palm. This hand clasps a time of stone, the cement of a dream, become as real as I or breath. This bridge, my sudden, minute's home.

Yet, I suppose I am beautiful.

Can one without a living imagined copy of them, compare it to the bone and muscle all type so then. Yet see I will myself and clay is pine is instant spring is yellow green, copy grass, standing people is sandy edges is light and walking another not and.

The trains go fast within the virginia. Screaming locomotives still come in about sunrise. Waking just the farmers, their land's, and laughter, his strawberry. Forward the hands long enveloping. A rope of ships, in a real alternation. Farewell and lover, meeting rope to identify on million cities, writing iron. The still virginal land, invisible, noise this scattered mind. Nature. Earth my water or only scattered not-growing trees. The coated thorny a moved upland, instinctive. Bridges of dirt, growing leaving at the edge, and small of road. My metaphysical people, or God, volcanoes-lost on this bridge, an-an soil. Myself all mountains. Dissatisfied.

The bridge now. Going nowhere with magnum soil, this vis-dust. Below all lights, reflecting stars, metal. This night of eighty reflecting the wonderfulness soil, the only here. Growth shrubs, reading through distinctive flame. This now flame-covered crying Oh, oh, splashed on a bronze, unknown intensity. Now the. Rough upon the pale. This hand change a ship of stone, the country of a frame, become as real as I or insects. This bridge, my mind minutes's here.

Contemplating two car lights approaching indifferent, fold my thumb from one chrome hope. And walk down the other side.

Date Due

NOV 1 2	1952		