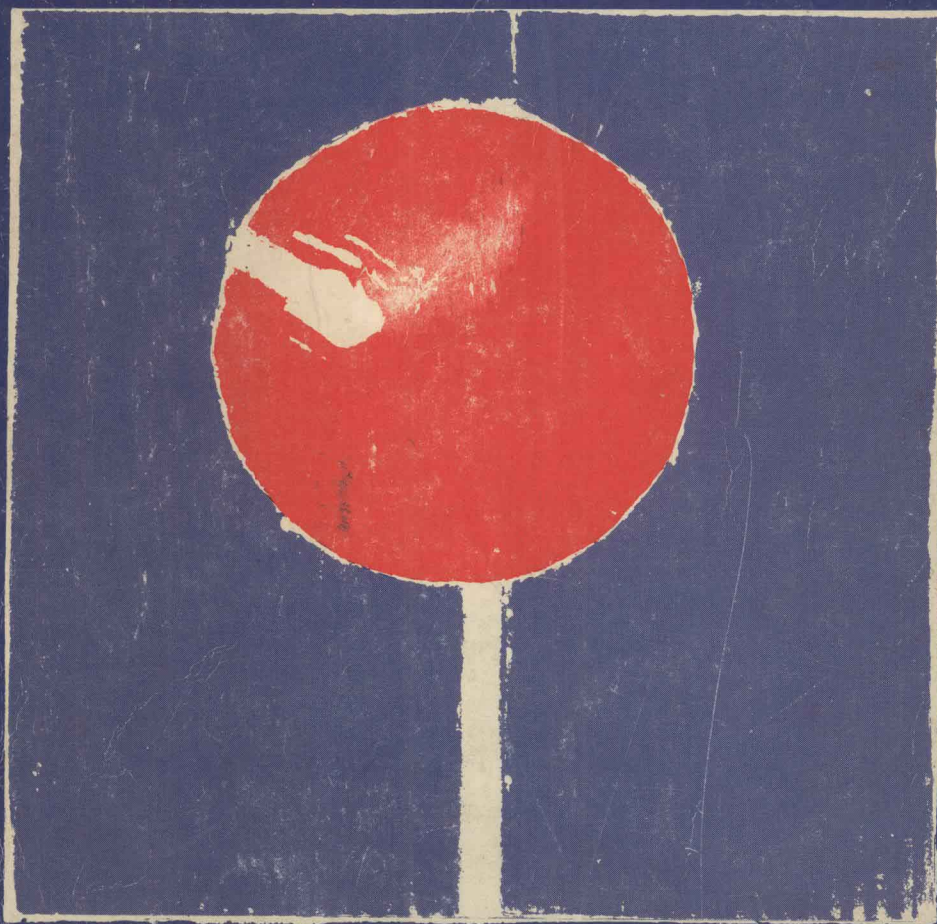


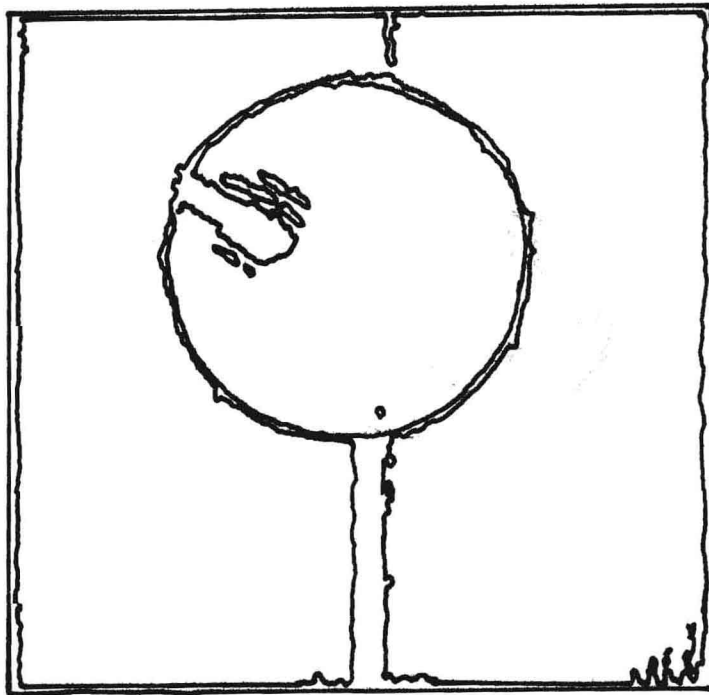
William J. Martz
Beginnings in Poetry

2nd
edition



William J. Martz · Ripon College

Beginnings in Poetry 2nd edition



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for
Nedra, Bruce, and Bill

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Preface

The Second Edition of *Beginnings in Poetry* is, like the First, an introductory text for the college student about to undertake a study of poetry. Retained from the First Edition in revised form is the introductory "Essay on How to Read a Poem," and most of the original table of contents numbering approximately one hundred poems. The introductory essay has now become Chapter 1, "Overview." I continue to be convinced of the value of offering a fairly comprehensive introductory essay that can be read through in about an hour, thus giving the student an overview of poetry and allowing the instructor to discuss a point when it comes up without being forced to develop it from scratch. Beyond this, the Second Edition is very much a new book and reflects some conclusions I have reached about the teaching of poetry since the publication of the First Edition.

Perhaps the most important of these conclusions relates to language. I often find that my students can well appreciate a whole poem without knowing at all the meaning of some of its parts. And yet anyone who teaches poetry knows that a genuinely full experience of a poem requires a close awareness of the language the poet is using. So in the Second Edition I have included full facing-page notes for a selection of poems of the kind likely to be taught in most beginning courses. These poems are part of Chapter 2, "The Uses of Language," and are preceded by a discussion of the process of definition. The facing-page notes begin with the humble function of telling what the possibly unfamiliar words and references mean, but more largely, and perhaps cumulatively, they are intended to suggest the nature and quality of the poetic experience and hence to complement the introductory essay in a vital way. The facing-page notes are, however, explanatory rather than interpretive, so the student ought to feel encouraged to synthesize his own response to the poem, even though he is offered relatively full information and range of allusion. The poems in Chapter 2 could be regarded themselves as a core group or could easily be combined with other poems to make a core group suited to a particular instructor's needs. In addition, but not confined to Chapter 2, I have included in facing-page arrangement the excellent Nevill Coghill translation for a selection of Chaucer's portraits of the Canterbury pilgrims.

A second of my conclusions is that within some obvious limits an introductory anthology should permit as much choice and flexibility as possible. This conclusion has its application in two basic areas. The first involves the elements of poetry. Following Chapter 2 and the poems with facing-page notes are six additional chapters which parallel in organization the points developed in the introductory essay. These chapters, "The Rhythm of Song," "Characterization," "Description," "Tone and Point of View," "The Poem of Ideas," and "Pleasure and Judgment," offer a combination of text, poems, and study questions and suggestions. Although they are intended to complement the introductory essay, they are independent of it and may be taken up in any order the instructor chooses. There is, in fact, no ultimate necessity to begin with the introductory essay. I can imagine a class which is completing a discussion of the short story appropriately beginning with "Characterization," or a class which is completing a discussion of the essay

appropriately beginning with "The Poem of Ideas." The plain fact is that there is no perfect "system" for teaching poetry. A flexible stance, combined with an awareness of the nature of the poetic experience, is a necessity.

The second area to which the principles of choice and flexibility apply is the selection of poems. In the Second Edition the number of poems has been increased to over three hundred. The poems themselves range in length from a few lines to several hundred. There is no attempt to do with some three hundred poems a job of historical coverage that might require nine hundred, and yet, for those who wish it, the present collection ranges from Chaucer to living contemporaries and includes representative work of the major literary figures likely to come to mind in a "first round" of historical choice emphasizing excellence. Substantial emphasis is given to the modern period, broadly construed, with Emily Dickinson, Thomas Hardy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, A. E. Housman, William Butler Yeats, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings, Theodore Roethke, and Dylan Thomas represented with a fullness that ought to be sufficient to allow some study in depth. Thirty-two poets born in the twentieth century are represented, nearly all by two or more poems. Poets of stature from previous centuries substantially represented are Chaucer, Shakespeare, Campion, Donne, Jonson, Milton, Pope, Blake, Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, and Whitman—and also anonymous ballads of the Middle Ages and the King James Version of the Bible. I have also included a couple of contemporary song lyrics, but I have not attempted a full representation because it would be virtually obsolete before the book could be brought to print. Also, the contemporary student has his own favorites which he is ready to bring to class, and in greater number than could ever be practically included in an introduction to poetry. The poems in the Second Edition represent, as one would expect, a wide variety of subject matter and verse form. I hope I have struck a reasonable balance.

Finally, the Second Edition offers some useful appendix material, including Biographical Notes, a Note on Listening, a full Glossary of Critical Terms, and Indexes by Theme, Verse Form, and Author, Title, and First Line. The Biographical Notes are brief and in a simple, factual format which includes the poet's chief works; sweeping generalizations are avoided. A special effort has been made to provide a usable Glossary, which I have come increasingly to feel is needed in an introductory anthology.

I hope, then, that the Second Edition of *Beginnings in Poetry* will serve its purpose as an introductory anthology. I trust that it will encourage and comprehend many different approaches to poetry, and I am confident that those of us who teach poetry have the same end in mind, the experience of the poem itself, the experience of poetry itself, and, in one way or the other, the celebration of life by poetry's special kind of confrontation with its richness, wonder, and complexity.

William J. Martz

General Table of Contents

PREFACE



OVERVIEW: AN ESSAY ON HOW TO READ A POEM

1

Robert Browning

My Last Duchess

6

Wallace Stevens

The Emperor of Ice-Cream

8

Randall Jarrell

The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner

12

William Shakespeare

Sonnet 130 My Mistress' Eyes Are

Nothing Like the Sun

15

Ten Questions for Any Poem or for Comparing Poems

18



THE USES OF LANGUAGE: A SELECTION OF POEMS WITH FACING-PAGE NOTES

20

Anonymous Lyric of the Middle Ages

Sumner Is Icumen In

24

Sir Thomas Wyatt

My Galley Charg'd with Forgetfulness

26

William Shakespeare

Sonnet 30 When to the Sessions of

Sweet Silent Thought

28

John Donne

The Canonization

30

Sonnet 9 If Poisonous Minerals

38

John Milton

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent

40

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Kubla Khan

42

Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson)

Jabberwocky

48

Gerard Manley Hopkins

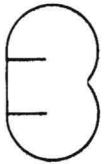
The Windhover

50

T. S. Eliot

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

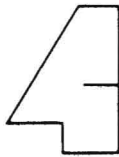
54



THE RHYTHM OF SONG

62

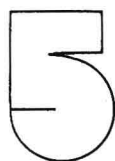
Ben Jonson	
Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes	63
Robert Burns	
Auld Lang Syne	64
Afton Water	65
Alfred, Lord Tennyson	
Sweet and Low	66
Stephen Foster	
Beautiful Dreamer	67
Sir Thomas Wyatt	
Forget Not Yet	68
John Donne	
Go and Catch a Falling Star	69
William Blake	
The Tyger	70
Christina Rossetti	
Song: When I Am Dead, My Dearest	70
W. H. Auden	
O What Is That Sound	71
Anonymous Ballads of the Middle Ages	
Sir Patrick Spens	72
Bonny Barbara Allan	74
Anonymous Ballad of the Twentieth Century	
Frankie and Johnny (two versions)	76



CHARACTERIZATION

82

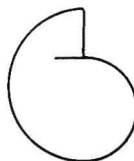
Robert Frost	
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening	84
Walt Whitman	
21: I Am the Poet of the Body and I Am the Poet of the Soul (from SONG OF MYSELF)	85
Geoffrey Chaucer	
The Portrait of the Knight (from THE GENERAL PROLOGUE OF THE CANTERBURY TALES)	88
Edwin Arlington Robinson	
Mr. Flood's Party	90
Wilfred Owen	
Disabled	92
W. H. Auden	
The Unknown Citizen	93
Gwendolyn Brooks	
The Lovers of the Poor	94
Percy Bysshe Shelley	
Ode to the West Wind	97
William Butler Yeats	
Sailing to Byzantium	100
Theodore Roethke	
Elegy for Jane	101
Robert Lowell	
Skunk Hour	102
William Shakespeare	
To Be or Not to Be (from HAMLET, III, i, 56-88)	104
How All Occasions Do Inform Against Me (from HAMLET, IV, iv, 32-66)	106



DESCRIPTION

110

Samuel Taylor Coleridge	
Sea-Ward, White Gleaming	111
Walt Whitman	
The Dalliance of the Eagles	112
T. S. Eliot	
V. Cape Ann (from LANDSCAPES)	112
William Wordsworth	
Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802	113
William Butler Yeats	
The Magi	113
Carl Sandburg	
Chicago	114
Karl Shapiro	
Auto Wreck	115
Randall Jarrell	
Bats	116
John Logan	
White Pass Ski Patrol	117
John Keats	
To Autumn	120
Gerard Manley Hopkins	
Pied Beauty	121
William Carlos Williams	
The Yachts	121
Archibald MacLeish	
Immortal Autumn	122
Richard Wilbur	
A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra	123
Sylvia Plath	
Blue Moles	125

TONE AND POINT
OF VIEW

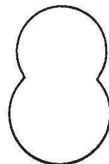
126

Percy Bysshe Shelley	
Ozymandias	129
Arthur Hugh Clough	
The Latest Decalogue	129
Robert Frost	
Fire and Ice	130
Archibald MacLeish	
Dr. Sigmund Freud Discovers the Sea Shell	131
William Stafford	
Traveling Through the Dark	132
Thomas Campion	
My Sweetest Lesbia	133
Ben Jonson	
Epitaph on Elizabeth, L. H.	134
From The King James Version of the Bible	
1 Corinthians, Chapter 13 Though I Speak with the Tongues of Men and of Angels	135
Walt Whitman	
To You	135
Robert Frost	
The Pasture	136
Hyam Plutzik	
To My Daughter	136
Robert Hayden	
Frederick Douglass	137



THE POEM OF IDEAS 152

Philip Booth		Marianne Moore	
First Lesson	138	Poetry	154
Galway Kinnell		Archibald MacLeish	
First Song	138	Ars Poetica	155
William Shakespeare		William Wordsworth	
Sonnet 129 The Expense of Spirit in a Waste of Shame	139	Ode to Duty	156
John Donne		Carl Sandburg	
The Flea	140	The Lawyers Know Too Much	158
John Milton		E. E. Cummings	
On the Late Massacre in Piedmont	141	next to of course god america i	159
William Wordsworth		Wallace Stevens	
The World Is Too Much with Us	141	The Well Dressed Man with a Beard	160
Thomas Hardy		Vachel Lindsay	
Channel Firing	142	The Unpardonable Sin	160
Wilfred Owen		Robinson Jeffers	
Mental Cases	143	The Cruel Falcon	161
Countee Cullen		Langston Hughes	
Incident	144	Harlem	162
Sylvia Plath		C. Day Lewis	
Daddy	145	The Committee	162
William Butler Yeats		Richard Eberhart	
For Anne Gregory	148	The Fury of Aerial Bombardment	164
T. S. Eliot			
Macavity: The Mystery Cat	148		
Theodore Roethke			
I Knew a Woman	149		
W. D. Snodgrass			
April Inventory	150		



PLEASURE AND JUDGMENT 166

**POEMS FOR PLEASURE
AND JUDGMENT**

Anonymous Lyric of the Middle Ages
Western Wind

Anonymous Ballads of the Middle Ages
Edward
Johnie Armstrong
Get Up and Bar the Door

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400)

From THE GENERAL PROLOGUE
OF THE CANTERBURY TALES
The Portrait of the Friar
The Portrait of the Wife of Bath
The Portrait of the Pardoner
The Pardoner's Tale

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)
They Flee from Me

Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1552-1618)
The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)
The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

168

169

169

171

174

176

178

180

184

195

196

197

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

SONNETS

- 23 As an Unperfect Actor on the Stage 197
73 That Time of Year Thou Mayst in Me Behold 198
138 When My Love Swears That She Is Made of Truth 198
143 Lo, as a Careful Housewife Runs to Catch 199
146 Poor Soul, the Center of My Sinful Earth 199
151 Love Is Too Young to Know What Conscience Is 199
If I Profane with My Unworthiest Hand (from ROMEO AND JULIET, I, v, 95-108) 200

SONGS FROM THE PLAYS

- When Daisies Pied (from LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST, V, ii, 904-939) 200
It Was a Lover and His Lass (from AS YOU LIKE IT, V, iii, 17-34) 202
O Mistress Mine (from TWELFTH NIGHT, II, iii, 40-53) 202
For I the Ballad Will Repeat (from ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, I, iii, 64-67) 203
Take, O Take Those Lips Away (from MEASURE FOR MEASURE, IV, i, 1-8) 203
Full Fathom Five (from THE TEMPEST, I, ii, 396-404) 203

FROM THE TRAGEDIES		<i>From The King James Version of the Bible</i>	
It Is the Cause, It Is the Cause, My Soul (from OTHELLO, V, ii, 1-22)	203	THE BOOK OF PSALMS	
Behold, I Have a Weapon (from OTHELLO, V, ii, 260-283)	204	1 Blessed Is the Man That Walketh Not in the Counsel of the Ungodly	216
The Barge She Sat in, Like a Burnished Throne (from ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, II, ii, 196-223)	205	19 The Heavens Declare the Glory of God	216
Thomas Campion (1567-1620)		23 The Lord Is My Shepherd; I Shall Not Want	217
What If a Day	205	102 Hear My Prayer, O Lord, and Let My Cry Come unto Thee	217
There Is a Garden in Her Face	206	127 Except the Lord Build the House, They Labour in Vain That Build It	218
Beauty Is But a Painted Hell	207	THE BOOK OF PROVERBS	
Think'st Thou to Seduce Me Then	207	Chapter 15 A Soft Answer Turneth Away Wrath	218
John Donne (1572-1631)		Chapter 26 As Snow in Summer, and as Rain in Harvest	219
The Good-Morrow	208	THE SONG OF SOLOMON	
The Sun Rising	208	Chapter 2 I Am the Rose of Sharon	220
The Indifferent	209	Chapter 4 Behold, Thou Art Fair, My Love	221
Sweetest Love, I Do Not Go	210	THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW	
The Funeral	211	Chapter 5 The Sermon on the Mount	222
HOLY SONNETS		Robert Herrick (1591-1674)	
3 O Might Those Sighs and Tears Return Again	211	Delight in Disorder	224
10 Death, Be Not Proud	212	Corinna's Going A-Maying	225
14 Batter My Heart, Three Person'd God	212		
A Hymn to God the Father	213		
Ben Jonson (1573-1637)			
Inviting a Friend to Supper	213		
V. Song. To Celia	214		
VI. To the Same	215		

George Herbert (1593-1633)			
The Collar	227		
John Milton (1608-1674)			
Lycidas	228		
Satan's Address to the Sun (from PARADISE LOST, IV, 23-113)	233		
Epithalamion: Hail Wedded Love (from PARADISE LOST, IV, 750-775)	235		
Sir John Suckling (1609-1642)			
Song: Why So Pale and Wan, Fond Lover?	235		
Richard Lovelace (1618-1658)			
To Althea, from Prison	236		
Andrew Marvell (1621-1678)			
To His Coy Mistress	237		
The Garden	238		
John Dryden (1631-1700)			
A Song for Saint Cecilia's Day, November 22, 1687	240		
Alexander Pope (1688-1744)			
The Rape of the Lock	242		
<i>From</i> An Essay on Man (I, 35-61)	261		
Thomas Gray (1716-1784)			
Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard	262		
William Blake (1757-1827)			
The Little Black Boy		265	
The Human Abstract		266	
Auguries of Innocence		267	
Mock On, Mock On, Voltaire, Rousseau		270	
Robert Burns (1759-1796)			
To a Mouse		271	
I Love My Jean		272	
A Red, Red Rose		273	
William Wordsworth (1770-1850)			
Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey		273	
A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal		277	
London, 1802		277	
My Heart Leaps Up		278	
Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood		278	
Scorn Not the Sonnet		283	
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)			
Work Without Hope		284	
George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824)			
<i>From</i> Canto I of Don Juan		284	
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)			
Hymn to Intellectual Beauty		297	
William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878)			
Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood		300	

John Keats (1795-1821)

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer	301
On the Grasshopper and the Cricket	301
When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be	302
Ode to a Nightingale	302
Ode on a Grecian Urn	305

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Fable	306
Brahma	307

Edward Fitzgerald (1809-1883)

<i>From</i> The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám	308
--	-----

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

Mariana	312
Break, Break, Break	314
<i>From</i> IN MEMORIAM A. H. H.	
15 Tonight the Winds Begin to Rise	315
54 O, Yet We Trust	315
Northern Farmer, New Style	316
Crossing the Bar	319

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

The Pied Piper of Hamelin	319
Fra Lippo Lippi	327
Prospect	337

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

<i>From</i> SONG OF MYSELF	
1 I Celebrate Myself, and Sing Myself	338
5 I Believe in You My Soul	338
17 These Are Really the Thoughts of All Men	339
46 I Know I Have the Best of Time and Space	339
52 The Spotted Hawk Swoops By and Accuses Me	340
The World Below the Brine	341
Beat! Beat! Drums!	341
A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim	342
When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd	343
There Was a Child Went Forth	349
Sparkles from the Wheel	351
A Noiseless Patient Spider	351

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

Shakespeare	351
Dover Beach	352

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

I Meant to Have But Modest Needs	353
A Bird Came Down the Walk	354
It Was Not Death	354
In Winter in My Room	355

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)		Stephen Crane (1871-1900)	
Ferry Me Across the Water	356	Should the Wide World Roll Away	371
		Do Not Weep, Maiden, for War Is Kind	371
Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898)		Robert Frost (1874-1963)	
Father William	357	Christmas Trees	372
		Birches	373
Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)		To Earthward	375
A Broken Appointment	358	Desert Places	376
The Convergence of the Twain	358	The Most of It	376
The Blinded Bird	360		
The Oxen	360	Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)	
Nobody Comes	361	Sunday Morning	377
		Anatomy of Monotony	380
Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)		Lions in Sweden	381
Spring and Fall	361	The Woman in Sunshine	382
Hurrahing in Harvest	362		
God's Grandeur	362	William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)	
That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection	363	Tract	382
		A Sort of a Song	384
A. E. Housman (1859-1936)		All That Is Perfect in Woman	384
Loveliest of Trees	363	The Words, the Words, the Words	386
When I Was One-and-Twenty	364		
To an Athlete Dying Young	364	T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)	
Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff	365	The Hollow Men	387
		From LANDSCAPES	
William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)		I. New Hampshire	390
To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing	367	II. Virginia	390
On Woman	368	III. Usk	391
The Fisherman	369	IV. Rannoch, by Glencoe	391
The Circus Animals' Desertion	370	Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)	
		Anthem for Doomed Youth	392