

THE LYRIC YEAR

Wilson Macdonald

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January



prone with snow the ancient masons came
and lifted an old cornerstone in place,
and to the music of wild bells began
that building which is evermore the same
and built anew each year to harbor man.
With craftsmanship and grace
they took the silver trowels of the moon
and spread the frozen mortar of the snow,
nor ever ceased their labors, late or soon,
their hands, benumbed by winter, moving slow.

All life is largo now; the sap congeals;
and, weighted with white armor, the stream runs
down sapphire channels of unlighted stone;
the hounds of cold and darkness at her heels,
yet spared the forest's bitter sob and moan.
Month of wild prisons!
Some see thy uplifted fingers crowning alms,
but they are symbols of high faith to me,
for not one doubt of spring is in those psalms
played on thy leafless harps of bush and tree.

They know not beauty well who have extolled
only the days of fruited vines and flowers,
and scorned those brave, travelling looms that wove
the first pale threads of summer's cloth of gold,
nor knew the depth of that great, sorrowing love
which braved the frozen hours
with courage to endure for beauty's sake,
that the white glow of April might be poured;
and that the seeds which slumbered might awake,
until all sleeping loveliness was restored.

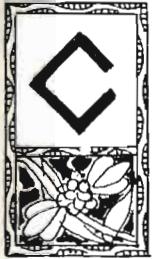
Only the green of balsam, spruce and pine
remains to flaunt thy frosty trumpet's call,
which robbed the trees their last autumnal glow;
and whither fled these flames from branch and vine
who looks on winter sunsets now shall know.
Warm is thine ermine shawl,
thrown carelessly on bushes lest the frost
should give to them a kiss so long and deep
they could no more restore what they had lost
to thieving winds, so heavy was their sleep.

Midway, between the sad descent of leaves
and the red buds of April, lapping rain,
in isolation's glory thou dost stand,
complaining not, although thy sun deceives
with wintry light that mocks the sea and land,
which cries for warmth in vain.
And yet thou leadest out these days of woe,
through winter's long captivity, by thy hand;
but thou, like Moses, shalt not live to know
the fruited vineyards of the Promised Land.

Month of the thaw's forgiveness, linger on:
the third white Queen of Winter comes too soon—
the most relentless ruler of the year,
whose reign shall bring regrets that thou art gone,
O kindly monarch of both smile and tear!
When blossoms burn in June,
and the world's floor is green and violet
we shall remember thee, who conquered woe,
nor find a rose to make us quite forget
the clinging ivy of thy spectral snow.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue, Toronto, Canada
January, 1949.

February



old and luminous cameo
scarmed with ice and brushed with snow;
month with not one bud or berry:
February.

Never was the ice so blue;
never was as cold a day:
tis a time we hurry through,
yearning for a raindrop's cry.
Month that never heard a leaf,
month of silence, frost and snow!
let this song, like thee, be brief,
and, like thee a cameo.

May, October, April, June:
all depart the world too soon;
but thou, white-stoled February,
never heard a call to tarry.

Tarry, then, my song no longer;
days await when suns grow stronger;
so adieu white child of snow,
cold and luminous cameo;
month with never a bud or berry:
February.

March



The buglers of March ride past my door—
cowabug riders, thirty and one:
their songs have a bacchanalian roar;
they ride wind-guided and cloaked with sun.
The fire of anger is in their veins:
I hate for cold and a thirst for rains.
Thirty-one cowabug-men are they,
singing wild songs of a new, glad day.

Why do they ride so swiftly in flight,
with cloudy beards and a spear of light?
The captain knows that each hoof's tap
is a call from sleep to the glowing saps.
When a new, clean hue is on the larch
we know it was passed by the riders of March.
When a yellow flame burns in the willows
and the fields are like deflated pillows,
when the moon looses clouds like a silver deer
we know that March is here.

The old scrub women are back again,
and they cleanse the earth's sad floor with rain,
and they wash the bloodroot's sleeping eyes
and tell them tales of the April skies.
But the Captain knows each broom and mop
is dreaming gold for his August crop.

Emancipator and mouth of dreams,
leading a hundred thousand streams
out of their bondage; hand that breaks
seal of the blue champagne of lakes,
daring rebel of outdoor things,
bringing song and the glow of wings!
There's never a sound that stirs my soul
like the wind in March demanding toll -
toll of the snow and toll of the ice;
arise, O winter, and pay the price.
Thirty-one cavalry-men ride by,
and the world is all one bugle cry.

Sob in the ice and tears in the wood:
ah! repentance is always good.
When the pine forgets its winter whine,
and lashes the air, it's a goodly sign.
Too many white hairs were in her locks,
too sealed her alabaster box.
Now odors trubble in wood and glen:
God bless the thirty-one cavalry-men.

The buglers of March ride past my door-
cavalry riders, thirty and one:
their songs have a bacchanalian roar;
they ride wind-girdled and cloaked with sun;
the fire of anger is in their veins -
a hate for cold and a thirst for rains.
Thirty one cavalry-men are they,
singing wild songs of a glad, new day.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue
Toronto, Canada
March 8th 1952.

April



reeing from their winter galleys
all the vassals of despair,
April's coming down the valleys,
gowned in blue and silver air.
Through the cedar-scented alleys,
where the dying winter rallies,
April's coming down the valleys
with her flowing hair.

April's lips are wild with laughter
April's eyes are full of dawns;
April runs, and hurrying after,
color races down the lawns.
Touching torches to each rafter,
swifter than the wind, and dafter,
April comes with peals of laughter,
and her feet are fawns.

April knows a world of waking;
all her thoughts are what shall be.
Blest that hour which sees her making
garments for each flower and tree.
In her fingers, cold and aching,
every seal of frost is breaking.
April, and her world of waking,
comes to set us free.

April speaks with cry of thunder,
and her call is not in vain.
April lifts the leaves, and under
frees the violet's purple stain.
Well she knows she did not blunder
when she rent each veil asunder
at the leaping of her thunder
and the weeping of her rain.

April, Priestess of Creation,
rise with music's living fire,
bringing song to consummation
in the world's discordant choir.
Beauty of transfiguration
teach to every man and nation
until love's warm ministration
is the world's desire.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue
Toronto, Canada
April 1948.

May



cented snow is on the breeze,
attared flakes are falling;
from their chancels in the trees
thrush and lark are calling.
Beauty's golden goblet fills,
then spills wildly over.
May comes in through daffodils
and tiptoes out on clover.

April is a timid lass;
May's a month of daring:
tulips flaming in the grass
have a royal bearing.
Never was a cloth unrolled
with a color bolder
than the dandelion's gold
on a meadow's shoulder.

Sandals cool and green has May,
cape and cap of ermine;
and each apple-blossom spray
is a fragrant sermon.

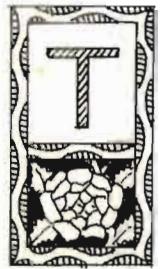
Beauty now has full command:
come ye heavy-laden,
burst the casks of Samarkand,
spread the rugs of Aden.

Far from where the tulip bleeds
(beauty's daring spender)
stands the iris in the reeds,
purple, proud and slender.
There's a flash of oriole-red
flaming in the cherry,
while in branches overhead
sings the gold canary.

May's the first note in a song
to the year's new wonder.
May's a juvenalian throng
leaping up from under.
May leads all the hosts of earth
back to wood and garden.
May's a door to summer's mirth;
May is winter's pardon.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue
Toronto, Canada

June



he world is white with cherry-trees,
a holy light on faery seas;
my garden's full of merry bees
and sweet with robin-rune.
My cheek is washed by fragrant sighs,
and roses stain my vagrant eyes,
as I go wandering paradise,
in June, in lovely June.

The day's astir with musk and myrrh,
and night's a purr of gossamer.
I cannot see for blossom-blur
the silver-riding moon.
Strawberry rugs beneath me spread,
and apple-bloom is overhead—
a canopy of white and red,
in June, in gentle June.

The lilacs speak their scented words
the orioles are demented birds;
the cattle, in tree-tented herds,
lie, shadow-cool, at noon.

The grass is lush on field and lawn,
and larks, that pealed the flush of dawn,
to higher chances now have gone
to tell the joy of June.

The hands of peace and love are here,
and bring surcease from woe and fear.
the cooling breeze and dove are here
and they together croon.

A thousand weddings rouse the dells
with song of Canterbury-bells.

The meadows throng with nectar-wells
to quench the thirst of June.

When June is over I shall flee—
as drunk a rover as a bee
who sips the clover's ecstasy
and trips a rigadoon.

Nor shall December's cold desires
wash out the embers of these fires
or make me unremember choirs
that sang for me in June.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue, Toronto, Canada.
June, 1951.

July



ever did a willow's sigh
sound so sweet as in July,
never did a waterfall
have so clear and cool a fall.

Heat is king, the crickets sing;
through the air cicadas spring.
All the winter wounds are healed;
elms pour incense on the field;
heavy-cargoed roam the bees,
scented port to scented port,
and the larkspur on the breeze
curtsies like a maid at court.
Poppies flame and roses swoon
in the year's most ardent noon.
As the pollen, floating by,
careless of all care grow I.

When the moon is large and round,
on a drift of new-mown hay
many a night my soul hath found
respite from the woes of day.
On the mattress of the earth
man may find a second birth.

When the heat becomes too bold
there's an anodyne of cold:
cooler acres on the lake
call me when the meadows bake.
Here I join young gods in bronze
plunging into silver ponds:
here I fly the heat's alarms,
holding winter in my arms.
Water has a saving power
in the passion of this hour.

From the lake I come, and lie
on a slope of shaded grass,
while above me slowly pass
white armadas of the sky.
These I ride to distant lands:
kingdoms never made with hands.

Pluck a reed from yonder shore;
place it on my lips, to play,
that you, too, may learn the lore
of a buring summer's day;
that you, too, may know as I:
never did a willow's cry
sound so sweet as in July.

Scorn not, then, this furnace door,
from which amber blessings pour:
amber tides of golden wheat
pouring through the doors of heat;
for when winter days are cold
you will bless this tide of gold;
and when ice-clad winds go by,
and the barren branches cry,

lip and heart will give their praise
to these burning summer days.

Never did a willow's cry
sound so sweet as in July.
Never did a waterfall
have so clear and cool a call.

Oak and Ann Street,
Vienna, Ontario
July 8, 1952.

August



HE year is on the hilltop; climbing days are over, and a warming leaf of red proclaims the hour of slow descent is here.

"Tis well the thirst for growth is sated now for the cup of sap is low on bush and tree—the sap which made the blossom's dream come true, and led the yearning bud to beauty's crown.

August is full achievement's holy hour and beauty's interlude. Now the year takes its first pause, and contemplation's dream looks upon carpets of bronze and the dark-hued ceiling of leaves. What charm shall ever mate the glory of completion? O blessed month wherein the insect's temper-teasing reign no longer thwarts the beauty of the wood, and man can walk beneath a roof of green in full possession of his holy hour.

We grumbled at March winds and April rain, at stinging black-flies in both May and June and at the sun's strong burning in July, but who, in perfect August, dares complain?

I walk the meadows and the priestlike elms
baptize me with their waters of cool jade,
and pour unto me wise litanyes
from their high bulbis in the holier air.
The breath of hot July took unawares
my soul, which now is fully reconciled
unto the passion of the summer hours.
In August heat my thoughts grow strangely cool.

Yea, strangely cool they grow, my fingers turn,
not the light leaves where modern pens have spread
their thin philosophy of life across
a wilderness of words, but heavier tomes.
I hear, with a new zest, Doctor Johannes
Baptista Bottinius make his plea:
his logic tired me last December; now
I sip it like sweet nectar, until a cloud
comes freighted with philosophy of Heaven;
and then what book of man can hold mine eyes?
And yet from books we whet our love for clouds.

O month without a dream, or need of dreaming!
for the full answers to all dreams are here:
the dream of rain in March, of buds in April,
of blossoms in May and vineyards in July.

Finger, O August, for I would thy days
were sweet eternities, and that the scent
of new-mown hay died never from the earth.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue, Toronto
August 3, 1952

SEPTEMBER



ere, now, at last the cloth of gold
is over all the meadows rolled;
and, as I walk, my feet are shod
with asters and with goldenrod.
I crush the yarrow in my hands
and breathe the aroma of far lands.
Flaming month, thou art the cause
of the birch-tree's wild applause.

Wind now rides upon the wind,
carting cargoes of the heat
back to Mexico and Ind.,
Ceylon, Borneo and Crete,
bringing zephyrs, sweet and cool,
to the wood and field and pool.

When the water and the trees
waken from their summer ease;
when you see a group of phlox
waltzing with the equinox;
when the ferns keep flame awake
with their fanning from the brake;
when the maples overhead
drain the dawn of all its red;
when the poplars, loud and bold,
rob the evening of its gold;
when the purple aster brings
color from the court of kings;
then you know September's here,
loveliest month of all the year.

All the world was green and jade
when this monarch took command,
and her frosty order made
gold and crimson all the land.
Scarlet maples in a line
answered first their forest queen:
only hemlock, spruce and pine
kept their faith with jade and green.

Fount of fire and mint of gold
which October soon will spend;
even beauty must grow old,
even loveliness must end.
Woodlands hoarded until now,
but their spending days began
when September from her brow
dropped a flaming leaf on man.
Then a spendthrift she became,
tossing with a prodigal hand
all her splendid hoard of flame
to the importuning land.
Now I wade in gold whose flow
covers every path I go.

In September is there given
symbol of the days in Heaven,
brought here on a silver salver
by an angel from the skies?
Now the whip-poor-will and thrushes
sing of joy in burning bushes,
and the loon amid the rushes
for the life eternal cries.

O September, gold September,
let me keep your burning ember;
let me keep it through the winter
when the fires are burning low.
Fairest month of all, September,
let me keep this to remember,
in my heart, when white December
weaves her wonderment of snow.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue
Toronto, Canada.

October



an a mortal man keep sober
in the wine-room of October?
Sauternes, sherries all about him,
one or other's sure to rout him.
Twice a man is he who drinks
when the poplar's champagne winks;
and his soul may grow divine
on the maple's scarlet wine;
all the woodland's godlike folk
quaff dark burgundy of the oak.
Poor the man who keepeth sober
in the wine-room of October.

All the hosts in Heaven await
beauty's dear inebriate;
man hath never failed in duty
who hath drunk the wines of beauty.
Boast not then that you keep sober
in the wine-room of October.

It is well this wine should pour,
with November at the door;
so I'll drain the deepest flagons
ere the winter days begin.
Press the sumach and snapdragons;
heap the goldenrod on wagons
for I'll have but empty flagons
when the wineless hours come in.

Let all mankind know the reason
of this color-flaming season;
for it tells that beauty's crowning
should be saved unto the last.
Age should be the fiery burning
of our noblest wish and yearning,
ere November comes with frowning
blowing winter's icy blast.

Bacchanalian-souled October,
beauty's carnivalian spender!
Can a mortal man keep sober
when thus tempted to surrender?
Till the last leaf on the tree
bacchanalian will I be;
and my soul shall grow divine
on the scarlet maple's wine.

Room of the Seven Poplars
2 Glenview Avenue, Toronto, Canada,

November



ome ironed yearning burns within my singing
for that bleak beauty scorned of lute and lyre
that loveliness of gray wherein are winging
the last wild lyrists of the marsh and mire.

And, last that migrant choir.

Should wing away all music from the land,
by one forgotten lake I chant this song
and that cold passion of her choic sand
shall to my muse belong.

This lake, unnamed in June, is still more nameless
amid this ruined grandeur of the year,
these roofless, pillared temples where the tameless
young Winter soon will chase her frosty spear;
and where even now I hear
the prelude of her long and ghostly wail
in boughs that creak and shallows that congeal.
And, like a child who hears some ghostly tale,
a strange delight I feel.

I saw the year pass by me like a dancer:
the imp of April and the child of May,
the modest maid of June with her soft answer
to every wooing wind that blew her way.
And now, this autumn day,
when the high rouge of leaf no more conceals
and there is none to pipe a dancing theme,
a woman old, with heavy toes and heels,
plots by me in a dream.

Above my nameless lake the broken fingers
of those once-hardy needs are jewelled with ice.
The mallard duck, despite this warning, lingers
until the gripping air is like a vice.

The year has tossed her dice
and lost the Indian summer, and the lone
chills, with her wintry laughter, the bleak skies;
and, where a meagre warmth is doled at noon,
a wounded pheasant dies.

And, lest these hueless days should pass despairing,
the rose has garbed her seeds in orbs of red —
the last warm touch of pure, autumnal daring
in all this frosty garden of the dead.

The quail, to hardship bred,
frames her soft eyes with tangled brush and brier,
and woos us with the contrast; and the hare,
waged by the forest's probing eyes of fire,
leaps from her peaceful lair.

This is the hour when the bold sun is sleeping
on his last couch — and here his lady comes,
cold as a cloud that will not melt to weeping,
and breaks the flutes and muffles all the drums,
and the last warmth trembles.

I know the road she walks to greet her lord
by the strange rustle of her silken dress;
or do I hear the oak-tree's phantom horde
of dead leaves in distress?

O troubadour's of spring! O bards of gladness
who in the scented gardens love to throng!
So loath are ye to sing the hour of sadness
when all the world is hungry for a song,
and nights are strange and long,
that I, in this pale hour, have called mine art
to hymn that beauty, scorned of pen and tongue;
for God Himself hath set my song apart
to praise His worlds unsung.

Montreal, Canada,
November 1917.

December



the consort of white silence, priestess cold
in that bare temple of the dying sun,
brave guardian of the ashes of the year,
dear patron of the helpless and the old,
sad mourner at the last autumnal bier!
Is then the year undone—
the year that lost its singing leaf and stream—
because from thy cold loins there is no birth?
Nay, for tomorrow's roses are the dream
of these chilled, barren acres of the earth.

I see thee on the ladder's lowest rung,
thou uncomplaining stoic of brave time
watching the last seeds through the hour-glass flow,
or leading wild bairns that are sung
by the white chorus of thy lyric snow.
What musicker can mime
the tempo of thine studies? 2oo, art thou
archivist of the manuscripts of light;
and bridal wreaths are ever on thy brow
throughout thy wedding-journey with the right.

June hath her deep regret that she must pass,
and rich September, in her opulence, mourns
for that red largess which she cannot hold;
but there's no reaper mowing in thy grass,
nor thieving fingers, eager for thy gold;
and thy thin, frosted horns
surpass the trumpets of the fruited hours,
muted by vines and muffled by the leaves—
bronze farificades in labyrinthine bowers
through whose deep maze of color autumn grieves.

Thou art the first of all the months to begin
that arduous upward climbing back to June,
back to the blossom's richly-scented fires,
back to the scarlet rose and yellow whin,
back to a host of hymeneal choirs
warming the world with sunne.
Though not one leaf of green is in thy hands
thou art the true beginning of the year;
and, from thy lengthened nights and frozen lands
came Ceres' harvest and Apollo's spear.

Caver of stalactites, mother of that skill
which limned by night upon my window-pane
the silver-crayoned etchings of the frost,
and robed the pines upon the byre hill
with curning that the ages have not lost.
Is sorrow then in vain?

Mourn not for these dark days; the heavens are bold,
and fiery pageants march the evening sky;
and, when the last pale amber swoons in cold,
the iceberg of a winter's night floats by.