

Bernice Ames

Selected Poems



Bernice Ames

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Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo. Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur magni dolores eos qui ratione voluptatem sequi nesciunt. Neque porro quisquam est, qui dolorem ipsum quia dolor sit amet, consectetur, adipisci velit, sed quia non numquam eius modi tempora incidunt ut labore et dolore magnam aliquam quaerat voluptatem. Ut enim ad minima veniam, quis nostrum exercitationem ullam corporis suscipit laboriosam, nisi ut aliquid ex ea commodi consequatur? Quis autem vel eum iure reprehenderit qui in ea voluptate velit esse quam nihil molestiae consequatur, vel illum qui dolorem eum fugiat quo voluptas nulla pariatur?

Where the Light Bends. Los Angeles: Wagon & Star, 1955.

In The Syllable of Stars. Francistown: The Golden Quill Press, 1958.

Antelope Bread. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1966.

Where the Light Bends

The shift of thought, the shade of mood
From child to man to dust eternally depends
Upon the color's depth and finitude
Where the light bends.

No one can gauge emotions' pace
Nor which smooth-mirrored side a prism thought may turn;
Uninterrupted spears of light won't trace
Where colors burn.

The void of heaven may be bright,
The seasons reach their pinnacle with pride and glow;
Unless there be a bending of the light
No one will know.

Color

Color fuses through each day's dominion
Surging over fully formed. opinion,
Rules the tide of nature's every turning,
Purples winter shadows, flames fall, burning.

Color bends the stem of thought's beginning,
Waits where vision falls at random spinning,
Blue direction dips the day's descent.
Words wear color in their filament.

You Said

You said,
And tulips in your hand were dripping red,
‘Tm sad to leave you for a little space.’
Dearest, can’t you read my open face?
You’ll never cleave the memory chained to me
Unless the naked waves divorce the sea.
Your presence loiters in this quiet room
As sweetness lingers after fine perfume
Is dead.

You said,
As I was darning socks with colored thread,
“I’m sorry that my conversation’s dim.”
Dearest, dancing on the very brim
Of mind you decorate my running thought.
Your Siamese twin, I am more closely caught
To you between the breaks of silence. Heard
And learned by heart is every single word
You said.

Sea Statue

Black against sunset the jetty leans
Straining for whispers of yielding waves,
Yearning for sea-talk this lover craves
The loved.

Sacred to beauty not hers she screens
Waste from the smooth. and compliant sands,
Splashing her form with the sea's demands,
Unmoved.

Never more lonely than when the moon
Pulls at the sea with her steady light,
Coaxing the water to flow from night's
Black stem;

The jetty abides while the distant tune
Sharpens the stillness that seems to mock
Waiting till waves with their burdened talk
Crash home.

Bluebird On A Wire

A clarion scrap of song usurps the wire
That needles through his tightly woven claws;
No casual commentator draws such fire
Of melody except to get applause
And having won his point, to fly away!
But this small troubadour has sharp designs
On my attention, pulls my gaze today
Up where a golden sun, unstinted, shines,
Where silver gleam on unencumbered wing
Points toward the freedom of a spacious sky;
If I could punctuate a line and swing
Above dissension how my song would fly!
No wire with birdlike comma could augment
My reasoning or challenge my intent.

After the Harvest

I.

Behold these stoic vines have bled their fruit,
Released their beauty on recumbent earth
And wear in abject poverty a dearth
Of loveliness. Long-fingered sleep will loot
The cyclic vigor and ascend the root
To reach the spread of branches, round the girth
Of foliage, will smother stirrs of birth
That whispered once within each dormant shoot.
The awful neatness of a vineyard cleaned
Of all its issue, robbed of every grace
Assails the combed decorum of its aisles;
And strong decisive rains have intervened
To tear the leaves and muddy weed-grown space
Where purple grapes once lay in crated piles.

2.

Conversion from the war of growth to peace
Is gradual, but to the unaccustomed eye
It happens overnight. Black spiders spy
How shrunken tendrils lose their hold, release
The few forgotten clusters through caprice
Of wind and rain and hang their web to dry.
The brilliance of the sun has seared the sky
Till evening cool shall mingle and increase.
The bleakness crumbles into quiet, signs
Of struggle fade. No fragrance cries at all,
No purple heaviness detains the hand
And bends the vine. Above, two charcoaled lines
Divide the cobalt blue, their crow-harsh call
Thinned into space, wing shadow over land.

3.

Yes, there is beauty in a simple line,

A lovely order in the vineyard now
That everything is green or brown. A vow
The vision feeds upon a single vine
Until a play of intellect shall shine
And furnish further beauty. Dreams allow
Imagination depth beyond the bough
Of grapes translated in the eye to wine.
Wild asters lick with purple tongues the wires
Stretched naked row on row and weeds run free
Along the lanes unshadowed now with fruit.
This contrapuntal quickening inspires
An apathy amid the snarled debris
Till spring shall stir desire within the root.

Black Label

A little boy is never free from mud;
And though adventure streaks from genial mien
The love for dirt inhabits root, not bud,
Wills him an allergy to being clean.
When he is young and given piles of sand
With copious do's and don't's and can's and can't's
He'll mold a modern map of sea and land
And wear the index on his short knee pants.
Then later with the sandpile days outgrown
He spurns the grass, as too conventional,
And heads for any out-of-boundary zone
Where culture's mark is unintentional.
When manhood reaches him your thankful sigh
Is answered with a toast, "here's mud in your eye."

In The Sun Of A Glance

In the sun of a glance,
(across the stubble
of many hands
reaching for every scrap
of this shattered moment)
the years melt away.

Suddenly the days of those years
as grains of sand in an hour glass
reach bottom —
are nothing in this shaft of light.
The room alone spreads space
between two pairs of eyes
locked in a glance.

Time was
time will be again
but now is forever.

The Children's Laughter

gathers in clusters of tone
like bunches of succulent grapes
sweet before tasting, and sweeter after;

bearing glints of light to a lower darkness,
rubs the surface of mellow harmonics
to a radiance long forgotten.

Another dimension of light for the ear
ascending fresh as morning's first scale
scooped from the top of the consciousness,

translucent as rising bubbles
and buoyant enough to bear your weight
across deep currents of day.

Can you be deaf to the crystal lacing of several laughs
pure and opalescent as honey
and the bee's deep feeling for clover?

Listen to the splash and crest
the spirit's fragile foam,
pearls with matchless lustre.

Teacher

With challenge your perfect gift
and a voice never toppling our foam of questions
words, sliding the slow curve of your smile
never fasten a subject.

From your two globes of reason shines a warning
of sealing any moment with immediate horizons.

Our hungers flow in one current —
toward you and your fountain of giving
where refreshment blows cooler
than the astringent spray of truth.

Startle

Burst from night's pocket
a seam of white light
wedges the croaching trees
discovering a fawn for the eye's oval stare,
expecting the phantom to tremble.

Moments hollowed for listening freeze
waiting for underbrush crackle.
More than sound the light stills the senses
of watcher and watched.

Slam on the nerves
burning with the breathless odor of hurry.
There in blue flowing mist
half in the memory, half in the forest
three fawns shrink into shadow
on a carpet of brittle leaves.

Sudden light threatens
the direction of leap.

To Stravinsky

Together we are poised
on the precipice of experience —
you veer to one side of my musical fervor
side step my knowledge of harmony,
your touch on my emotions not warm, not elated
but strange.

You persuade many snatches of melody
to flow in several currents together
separate as oil on water
toward no resolution in my comprehension.
Your music is clean as a willow wand
wafting away all expletives
yet curved with no shape of my knowing.

Together we are poised:
one false twist of baton
would skid your whole notes into usual harmony;
one moment of unguarded listening
would tumble my thoughts into confusion.
We tilt on the tight-rope of time.

Acolyte

Fingers of organ music
square his shoulders.
Litany lingers
in his solemn stride

as he nears the shadowless cross
red-robed and sure
with reverence to reach
his taper to candle.

A closer moth to the light
than we who fear the heat,
who withdraw into shadows
he serves with simple gesture.

His lifted face, one with the flame,
burns a slow even beauty;
clear to his toes runs the wick
of peace.

On The Windless Water

Tonight I followed the hem of the lake
to find where the full moon
leaned her arm on the liquid cushion.

I missed her conceit on the windless water.
Too young the air, impatient the watcher.
Later she leaned over the patina of pine boughs
loving the image she loaned another planet.

I cast a stone at her smugness;
the hit was direct.
Silver splinters streamed silken and beautiful.
Stone after stone cut her cameo
dividing her oneness
into fragments of many candles.

I lingered heaping silence around me
till she moved away from the mirror.
I watched her shifting shower of light
leave my riddled darkness
and the shadows deepen.

Parcel Post Window

A package pulls them
to this window that swallows human desires
hugged in brown paper, criss-crossed with string
and wished on their way to far places.
Pulled from the street's quick pulse
they stand in geometry of gesture:
a queue of people waiting
head-circles tipped on an axis of apathy,
feet based to support each triangle of being.
Curiosity falls obliquely near the window
on the second in line
with ears atilt for the mention of contents.

The package is fragile. Handle with care.
The hand stamp thumps from ink pad to wrapping;
red stamps slipped from wet sponge
smack the paper awry.

An oblong package, home-wrapped and awkward
but marked for immediate delivery
and mailed in personal faith
from this square window corrugated with the hurry of people.

The Man With A Pencil

veins the bloodless face of paper
with tendrils of thought and symbol
webbing himself with the future
and other men.

Chained to a discipline of lead
his fingers curl with pain of small space
his wrist barely moving to quicken
a forgotten truth, a centuried beauty.

From his heart uncoded urgency
yet its central beat beat beat
translates him like a clock
in a prison of rhythm.

Walled by body, barred by brain
his wisdom can only flatter the paper
in fragments and glance the window
like brittle leaves in a persistent wind.

Bus Boy

In the Rembrandt darkness
from ebony· crinkles you roll your eyes
and move in ripples like a laughing river
among flower faces and tendrils of smoke;
the growing black stem of your arm
from its white starched sleeve supports a tray
drifting like a cloud across the room.

In the depths of this mine
strident with laughter and drumbeat
brittle with clinking glasses
the sun of your service rubs me over·
dimming blatant sound with soft “yes sah”.

Supple swift symbol of continuity
tempered in a blaze of shattered harmonics,
oh musical interlude .1
between want and plenty, clutter and order
your rich onyx grin, buffed to high gleam
maps the . ease of your cloud drift,
the buoyant journey of night.

Grazing

Where is the noble earth revealed
more vitally than a fenced-in field
where cattle wander circumspect
and ponder? Bovine intellect
accepts the warm and greening loam
with quiet grace.

Who better garners energy for need
than munching cows or transmigrating seed
where a sense of waiting on this plane
grows strong in wind and green in rain?
Affection for a tranquil home
emblazons space.

Leave As The Antelope

Wary and watchful of a wink of motion
sensing the slightest maneuvering breeze
you statue silence with devotion
like winter trees.

Freed from inertia by the smallest sound -
a cloud of quail from grass where you knelt -
as easy as breathing you leave the ground
and ripple the veldt.

Flecking the plains in stillness of duty
and leaning the wind-way grasses are blowing
the truest translation of your beauty
was your sudden going.

