

# Grover I. Jacoby

## Selected Poems



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Jacoby was born in Los Angeles County to Grover Isador and Rosalie Seligman (both of whom were born in Los Angeles, as well as his maternal grandmother) and lived his entire life there. His maternal grandfather was Harris Newmark (1834-1916), a German businessman and philanthropist who had emigrated to the U.S. in 1853 (he later wrote a memoir, *Sixty Years in Southern California: 1853–1913*). Jacoby's family started the Jacoby Bros. Clothing Store in downtown Los Angeles in 1878, selling out to the May Company in the early 30s. Jacoby only published one small volume of poems, *The Human Patina*, in 1938, but he edited two long-running national poetry magazines, *Variegation* (1946-1959), devoted to free verse, and *Recurrence* (1950-1959), devoted to poems that rhyme. Another shorter-lived journal, *Comment in Motion*, was devoted to translation.

*The Human Patina, and other poems*. Hollywood: The Press of Hollycrofters, 1938.

# Thoughts of an American on the Beach at Kamakura

A grandson of the Samurai  
Sits stiffly in a bathing-suit.  
Out a distant window slip  
The thin notes of a flute.

A woman in a blue kimono  
Sinks down upon the sand;  
The sea bites with his white curved teeth  
The granulated land.

Dark children tumble playfully  
Within the foaming jaws.  
O oriental loveliness  
With occidental flaws,

It matters not you startle  
My bald Caucasian eye:  
The pines shoot from chalk palisades  
Across blue depths of sky.

# The Human Patina

I

Jabbed by sunlight,  
With mankind stuffed,  
This hill of houses  
Trees intertuft.

At its feet swirl  
The boulevards.  
At its heart shriek  
The child-raced yards.

II

Why do the insects and the autos hum?  
Their infinitesimal wings and rubber tires  
Wash the air of silence.

You  
At the window,  
With your staring out,  
Put this vacant question to the world.

You are altogether delicate,  
But your spiritual jaws  
Are grossly occupied,  
Everlastingly revolving,  
Extracting whatever sweetness there may be  
From the chewing-gum of ennui.

III

One hundred and forty square windows  
Grace the facade of the square office building.

Like a stroke of lightening petrified,  
One slender courageous fire-escape

Zigzags down the face of this gaping manifold monotony.

IV

Wind and sun pour no life into this air  
Void of sound and movement.

But suddenly,  
A dog cuts it with his bark;  
A car rips through it;  
A bird's twitter ripples it  
For one live moment. . . .

Limp and motionless again,  
It is a swamp,  
A standing-pool of silver death,  
Where thoughts curve upwards  
Like ailing reeds  
Drawing white poison from its filmy depths.

V

The hammer pounds,  
And lumber falls on lumber.  
The air is littered with such trash of sound.  
Here where the barnyard yet holds forth  
With scattered cock-crows, horses' whinnings,  
The sunlight spreads its golden lake  
Over the bright floor of planted fields.

But soon the vast tomato-plots shall melt away.  
The final harvestings shall come.

The subdivisions,  
Harbingers of suburbs,  
Here and there  
Split the bright landscape into city lots.

It will not be long,

Till the whole earth is coated with this progress,  
Ribbioned with asphalt,  
Stuck through with skyscrapers.

The hammer pounds,  
And lumber falls on lumber.

## VI

“The city at night,  
The city spread over the hill.  
That is all there is to show.”

“But it is only a black pincushion.  
The steel pin-heads gleam, perhaps,  
But what of it?”

Some other night I may have eyes,  
Not tonight.

Tonight I hunger for ancient lands,  
For tall Gothic churches,  
Cruised Byzantine domes,  
Delicate minarets,  
And all the world's temples made with hands.”

## VII

The streets are twanging  
Like rubber bands  
In all the auto-  
Ridden lands.

You would find  
A street someday  
Where life is lived,  
Not sped away.

# The Pomegranate

Man cuts away the swollen rind  
To the fine web that holds  
The rosy frozen lucent drops  
Within its yellow folds.

He eats the dainty treasure!

Ah, I believe he would

Eat all of art and nature

If he thought he could.

Mestizo-Tenement

The soiled wooden frames have vanished with the day.

The windows are slabs of yellow light

Against the darkness.

I cannot see; I merely know,

Within that mystic yellow stone,

Children are moving

And the future forming.

These are the half-dark peoples

Who shall flood us with their offspring,

Engulf us,

Making one river,

That shall flow

Into the black and yellow oceans of humanity.

# The Medievalist

A motor car rasps by!  
She exclaims that she will die!

If she heard a carriage creak,  
Would she survive another week?  
The Pleasure Finder  
He relished solemn similes  
Or a fantastic joke,  
Admired cold grey Gothic,  
Hot spiralling Baroque,

Trees gold-green with sunlight,  
Trees grey-green with mist,  
Tales told by romancers  
Or by some realist.

They who scorned his smiling face  
And they who often tell  
Of his praise as cheap as sunlight,  
They know very well  
That he is still enjoying life  
In heaven or in hell.

# The Acacia Trees

The acacias are full of brittle wind-life.  
Sunlight and shadow slant and merge  
    through the rain-clean foliage.  
How sunlight and shadow and wind love the clean  
    things of nature.

# To Emily Dickinson

She searched among the flowers  
To find the honeyed word.  
Her accents pure and silvered  
Were stolen from a bird.

She snared the stars in spider-webs  
Of quaint and careless rime,  
Skins woven with the frailest thread,  
But they shall hold through time.

# Garden Scissors

To one indoors,  
With each stem-cutting  
Your scissors clink  
Of the sunlight in the garden  
And of the flowers for the table tonight.

As Japanese poems do,  
They say so much in one sharp syllable.  
Winter Day  
The dead blue asphalt sky  
Is as devoid of glitter as the asphalt street  
Where withered leaves,  
Dry spray of the wind's waves,  
Splash scratchingly across hard surfaces.

Dead street,  
Dead leaves,  
Dead sky,  
Three poisons for the soul touched by nostalgic moods.



















































































































































































