

C.F. MacIntyre
Selected Poems



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Carlyle Ferren MacIntyre was born in Des Moines, Iowa and graduated from the University of Southern California, receiving his doctorate in Marburg, Germany. He taught at various places around Los Angeles, including Los Angeles Polytechnic High School, Occidental College and UCLA. He received a Guggenheim in 1938 to work on his translation of Goethe's *Faust* (New Directions, 1941). The experience provided material for his first book of poems, *Cafés and Cathedrals*, published in 1939. One poem in the collection, "Detail on a Street Corner in Herculaneum," proved to be controversial, leading to his transfer from UCLA to Berkeley. Though he published several more books of original poems, his reputation largely rests on his translations of modernist European poetry by Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke. He died in Stuttgart, Germany.

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Cafes and Cathedrals. New York: Oxford University press, 1939.

October Songs, by the poet called MacIntyre. Laguna Beach: Laguna Verde Imprenta (Ward Ritchie), 1982.

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Tiger of time, and other poems. New York: Trident Press, 1965.

Helianthus Annuus

Perhaps the rose is overpraised. The sun
allows a chaster flower his shield's design,
the flame-rayed orb impregnate of his colour
till the gayest dancer on the wind is duller
than this elected glory on a stalk,
turning—tho the roots are wedged in rock—
true and geared to the moving of the sky
with steel precision: authentic heliotrope.

None save the smoke-eyed eagle dares address
the god. Who hankers mysteries must learn
from the oracles of this austere priestess,
trance-rapt and faithful past the swirl of space;
must silently stand watching, to discern
the god's grace shining on her humbleness,
his true gold answering from her upturned face.

The Park

All the lanes lead, with sudden curve and angle,
astounding with green vistas and ferny dells,
thru a landscape where man's artifices mingle
paradoxes in emerald: bowers, dials,

flower clocks, mazes, with marble gods and hybrids;
and the close is stocked with squirrels, rabbits, and deer,
eloquent parrots, dry tortoises, and sly birds;
fruits ripen, exotically foiling the tricks of the year.

The lanes lead surely, and feet once in the path
come to a fountain eventually where the eye
is lured to center on life bare to the pith
and watch white waters it dares not go by.

Tall, they leap and poise, bright under the sun,
that instant when becoming attains to being:
tiptoe in crystalline quiet . . . and, the thing done,
seek earth, laughing, singing, and obeying.

Simple Arboreal

Trees in autumn learn to wear
a desolate new—widowed air,
or in martyrial madness strip
their round limbs to the Wind's thin whip:
frozen to black congealed veins
in the silver flesh of snow and rain,
stiff—gnarled fingers of starved hands
half—buried in forgetful sand.

Then, as if Widows dried their tears,
hung fractured emeralds from their ears,
bound green samite on their breasts,
smiling to greet the hero—guest—
or rather, in mute offering
before the Pentecostal spring,
the trees stand, maiden, tips to roots,
dreaming of buds and flowers and fruits.

Eastern Winter

Colts in the lee of haystacks huddle: lost
orphans shivering from forelock to heel—
how arrogantly Winter in gray steel
rides the brown fallows, rings with shoes of frost
the roadways, hangs a shroud on each fence post,
and stills the waters with a silver seal.
His plainsong is the snowbird, crow, and teal,
and chimney-soughings his essential ghost.

But safely in the heart, hobbled like a mug
of cider, April mimics on green feet
glide, wrapping your thin shoulders with a rug;
a coil of golden cat, September heat
purrs in your lap . . . and you foretaste some sweet
similar dregs yet from Time's big stone jug.

For Robert Frost

Adonis

This hunt is all. Definitive signatures
are graven in his thigh by ivory styles
of the rutting boar. The boy has got the cure
for hf'e's contingencies. Observe: he smiles.

The brisk arterial thud of systole
pumps winy lustrals for the thirsty Loves.
Sheep—herders flagrantly in Sicily
will flute this dying in smug laurel groves.

Virgins will plant him in red pots of barley,
praying to be conceived of bright boar—Slayers,
and listen for the mort-note, late and early,
that they may hunt the hunter of their prayers.

Atalanta

Fleet-footed, swifter than the Boeotian mares,
spurning green divots from the fateful track,
she is doomed to run one race the more
than she can trot with laurels on her back.

A hundred panting suitors fell
behind the nimble pistons of her calves
while drop by drop retributively full
her urn brimmed with the tears of futile loves.

Let her beware of fruit, of pippins most
which slowly mellow until, golden-ripe,
they shall roll before her at the furlong post
to blunt her brilliant speed with aureate rape.
And she shall lose, beaten by that inching urge
no virgin may elude, being come at last
under the sign of that more amiable age
which sprints in perfect form, but not too fast.

What Darius Saw

All night the great king
paced the palace floor
and hurried forth at dawn
to see,
thru the squint-hole m' the prison door,
how Daniel was getting on.

Even to the king
the man seemed awful and tall.
The lions, lashing their thighs
and slavering,
were chained to the rocky wall
by the iron in Daniel's eyes.

Byzantine Mural

Commanded by that which there is no withstanding,
he was immediately in the room . . . and bright,
as if he were a wick; a glow not blinding
invisibly pierced and leavened the room, the cot,

the whitely startled girl whose hands were cups
about the fear of her breasts, and her mouth an O,
who was suddenly mistress of the awe that saps
the stiffening out of bones, lets the joints go.

Gently precise he spoke, this calm physician:
her body was a garden sealed, an ark
about a mystery that drank her blood

with greedy roots for the dedicated work
of bloom and fruit. But frozen to stone, she stood
graceless against gold dulled past light's compassion.

The Spider of Twickenham

Awakening, Mr Pope, arachnoid wretch
in a night cap edged with lace, rang one to fetch
his pot of coffee, whence he sniffed the steam
while he distilled the venom of his dream
in twinned herpetic distichs whose each coil
glistened with hard enamel, clean of oil.

Being got up at last, with canvas girt,
warmed with a rabbit's doublet 'neath his shirt,
in undertaker's black, he felt so strong
he swanked a rapier eighteen inches long
and in a chaise went spanking off to Kew
or Strawberry Hill where the best scandals grew.

On a thick book at dinnertime propped high,
he roved the table with an ogre eye,
thin vulture claws, and gorged on ratafee,
lampreys, spice-cakes, and oceans of Bohea . . .
then, surfeited, tho Wales himself were there,
he snored like Stertorus, strapped in his chair.

Pope never laughed. He pinched a guinea till
the embossed sovereign shrieked, was choked, grew still;
yet, as a guest he tipped so Croesusly
that servants all refused their salary!
The man is brittle shards and dust now, urned
in black basalt the Elers Brothers turned;

but his slow honeyed malice trickles on
like gilded scorpions mincing down a lawn
of verdant steel—cut velvet. Mr Pope,
scannm'g man's manners thru the microscope
of his deformity, stabbed and conspired,
phlebotomized the praise that he desired,
was glutton of the world . . . and from the world retired.

Circus

Aerial fleas, in a canvas upside—down
bowl, centrifugally marking dizzy arcs
on radius ropes—which are incidentally insured—

swing on bull-dog teeth, kick hats from clowns,
alight among ladies whose tights are intimate bark
on mighty hips and bosoms to be endured . . .

while Walrus points a push ball on his snout
in the second ring, and torch-daubed faces grow white
watching a personage vomit preposterous fire.

Somewhere between the gate and the going-out
the last peanut is crunched. Off go the lights,
and men are shut of the dream that they came for.

When the elephants of illusion fade, when the snakes
of error and ignorance are charmed, grow stiff,
when the lust that licked at the lady acrobats

is sublimate, it is clear the self awakes,
stomps to square walls of time's more durable stuff
and hangs mirage in the hall, safe under his hat.

An Amiable Antiphony of the Antinomies

Acquilon, calvous and obese,
Fragilon, tenuous, moderne
yet fritillary, sat at ease
by thin shells of Sauterne.

Said Fragilon to Acquilon:
How you are rooted, fortress-fast!
While I, alas, will soon be gone,
you're of the protoplast.

But Acquilon, that man of strength,
patted with words the lustrous head
of Fragilon and coughed; at length
oracularly he said:

My lad, I'm but an epigone,
a cenotaph, a metaphor;
but you are of the noumenon
the perfume and the core.

(The curious gutter—sparrows hopped
nearer the cafe' table, cocked
receptive heads; the coo-doves stopped
as deep-voiced Aequilon talked.)

Your innate frangibility
makes you blood-brother to the Ding-
an-sich. You're both phantasmically
marsh-fights flittering.

Myself shall crumble, a cracked rock
of error, riven from pole to pole,
while, poised above the thunder-shock,
truth's butterflies shall sip your soul,

said Acquilon to Fragilon

and shook his hand; but even while
he grasped him, Fragilon was gone
along an exit-smile.

To William Y. Elliott

Fancy and Imagination

Lying m' the green silence of the grass
thru the slow-footed afternoon of a child,
he thought of pyramids and the gods of Greece
precariously above him in the aisle
thru the oak trees to heaven. A green biwa
thrummm'g himself was a locust or a hop-blossom;
rank ivy up the elm wound writhing boa,
the sky became quixotically a basin.

Then, more as if he dreamed, the air leaned down,
pressed the trees on him; a squirrel brushed his cheek;
two jays swooped low with azure battle-din;
wind from a grass-blade seemed to and did speak . . .
and the boy was the pivot of a vasty wheel.
Space stopped. The sky was closer than his home.
Time's run-down clock made goose-flesh on him while
he knew not if he were the world, or the world were in him.

These United States

This blob of beach Columbus found
had better been left for the gulls' playground,
to slushing waves, the wind at dawn,
to kelp and the grunnions' silver spawn;
for Johnny Doe is a sullen souse,
and Jenny the slut has erring feet;
honour's throne is a bleak outhouse,
and love with the swine gnaws acorn meat.

It's big we are and little we are
on a mud-speck sloughed from a dym'g star;
but such as it is, Greenbaum has got it,
has stolen, short-weighed, foreclosed on, bought it
for Rachel's bosom. This is life
in a garlicky ghetto where we stand
before the rabbi with a knife
of ultimate Shylock poised in his hand.

“Smell Far Worse Than Weeds”

All you to whom I have given myself and given
myself to smiles that turned to the sere with autumn,
you who took my flagons clean to the bottom
yet squinted wry at my deeds with the rawk of raven,

you with whom I have quarreled for the flick of woman's
wavering eyes, who have sold me for thirty pieces,
who have not salved me when quixotic poses
left sore my rump: I have sloughed you off with common

clod-polls, have grappled me stones that are not brittle,
trees with fruit and shade or the austere outline,
boats with gull-bellied sails and foot-firm ratlines
that yield to a storm yet hold, stars whose fierce mettle

is faithful even by day to me in my cistern
where I, having given up all, crouch to consider
why should the human soul sting worse than an adder
because of an itch in a sponge which blood set festering.

Four Oxen

SYRACUSE

With snowy Hanks and swaying dewlaps, withers
slow as heavy lava levering boulders,
they pull the bright share through all winds and weathers,
and the oak yoke shines on their shimmering shoulders.

Above the broad brows toss the clicking forks,
the slender spear-horns with their onyx-gleam;
and the sleek rippling muscles make a steam
like marble-dust where mountains are at work.

All summer teems in their black nostril's breath
with vetch and clover, and their sweat smells sweet ;
they fatten the starved with spicy dung.

In their moist mirroring eye-balls earth is hung
below the sky's contracted azure breadth;
and the sea feels their massive basalt feet.

Drapers' Market

TUNIS

Soft Moorish arches, fiercely inlaid tiles
by doorways beyond interview : the street
of green and scarlet pillars. With wide smiles
of evil teeth, the noisy Arabs strut

through filth or sit in hulks with the red fez
above eternal coffee. Here is East,
and you are alien, homesick and confused,
pricked by the bubblings of the holy yeast

which suddenly in the muezzin's cry
swoops down from heaven and makes these fellows squat,

toward Mecca, on a bit of prayer mat,
to answer, bawling with that goaty moan . . .
while, silver on the mosque against the sky,
two crescents shine—and one is the new moon.

Cathedral

CHARTRES

As twins who in their first years look alike
and have each other's way in gait and gesture,
strive friendly and seem one, yet stand alone,

while each grows bravely what the other lacks
who has the sweeter voice or nobler posture—
though they are the same blood and the same stone:

these phoenix-towers guard the Royal Portal
where humbly the triumphant chisel carves
the legend of men yearning toward the immortal
with haggard bodies without weight or curve;

and the great windows, brimmed from the sky-wells,
splinter fierce light against the pillared awe
of this vast greyness, diapering floor and walls
with hues that men whose faith knew heaven saw.

Gondoliers

Sleek cockroaches from the green slimy drain's,
the black gondolas scurry through the town:
one with the intimate blood that thuds its veins,
bobbing on its throbbings, up and down.

The noisy rascals muscling the long oars
are athletes, buccaneers, musicians, guides . . .
yet yesterday they rowed from these stone shores
a whiskery Doge to wed an ocean-bride,
or were suave panderers paddling ebon-hearses
on the Lagoon in moonlight: all their task,
to eye the halberd-prow and smoothly pass

what lovers (who were bravoed behind masks)
whispered, did, or sang in sugary verses
to ladies, frail and lovely as blown glass.

Night Markets

II. RETAIL

69, RUE DES QUATRE VENTS

This meat, almost as lewd as cinema stars—
more nude than naked—undulant Goya-flesh
drawn with a dirty crayon, struts up stairs

and down, with little veils of fish-net mesh
revealing heavy lava-slides, drooped bags
of flabbiness, sponge-toadstool-tissue : brash

as the false lashes, elephant Mallot-legs,
the paper flowers, carmined mouths and nipples :
timed to the slimy movement of rose-slugs.

The workmen's paradise, with drunken dribbles
blurring these Eves With haze—till the hard hands
must grind out cider, even from these dried apples.

' Just wait in line ! ' (The gendarme.) And behind
the counter sits Madame. Here life rehearses
grimly with dying whores the more refined
triumph of the completely successful horses.

Isle of Swans

They glide on Seine—slow barques with antique prows—
calmly as if life were eternal autumn;
and when they dive, the feathers on their bottoms
are pointed lily buds. The willow boughs

fence the green park in which they take the sun,
lolling and prinking, vain as hetaerae,
with oil and strigils—till they fold and dry,
clean as a kneeling flock of white-capped nuns.

They hide their heads beneath their wings and nap,
but suddenly wake up with one accord
and waddle on black paddle-feet to play

clouds on the water, lovers in the lap
of Leda, the proud steeds of Elsa's lord,
or a brilliant idyll waiting for Monet.

Idyll Beside the Lower Tiber

This water-rhythm of the washerwomen
surpasses wind on wheat, the rococo ocean,
swallows' dipping, dolphins' caracole-swimming :
they work like blood in earth's systolic motion.

Bending by the brown river, up and down
with measured stichomythia of dawn
and twilight, how their backs and buttocks carve
the ultimate line beyond the sculptor's curve.

The round hard arms are brazen piston-rods,
a golden breast pops from a scarlet shirt,
a cool White knee slips past a dull green skirt,
the terra cotta faces flush sweaty-red.

They chatter and sing, assoiling the soil of life,
churning the soapy turquoise where the sky's blue
bubbles in water . . . in this task that love
does patiently because it will never be through.

Tanzbar Libelle

LEIPZIG : EASTER

Tap tap tap tap tap!
'The Donkey Serenade.' The drummer's bored.
That bubbling girl who's finally reached the top
of joy slumps on the table. A fat bard
sings in leather breeches, feathered hat;
Hans wall's his heart out in the saxophone.
Gretchen with the knees is getting hot,
denies immediate thought of going home.

Emmie makes up to Loulou's manly smile,
the brown storm-trooper's heiled his right arm stiff,
the hall exhales a vile and stale beer smell,
and youth gets tough pin-feathers for the fluff
rubbed off its rear. Here blasé Bel Ami,
approached by sleek Delilah, swiftly crosses
himself and scares her off—the Lenten spree
drifts safely past the annual Easter crisis.

The Temple of Juno

AGRIGENTUM

With thick-trunked pollard—olives, the hill rises
to the improbable sky, and the flaked rust
of Tertiary tufa and crumpled columns rests
deeply in time (with stolen statues, friezes

and metopes) . . . but Winter flowers fetch
the goddess homage: the crisp prickly curled
acanthus, the snake-headed aurum coiled
with quivering tongue, the dachshund-blooming vetch,

the purple iris, dear to Proserpine,
the frail alyssum's umbeled tuft of lace,
with the flat creeping lichen's gold-green lice,
and the niggardly whorl of stunted dandelion,

the fumatory's blood-pronged teeth, the green
four-rayed euphorbia, the daisies rimmed
with carmine, the snapdragons' rosy grim
and lion mouths, narcissus that has grown

more modest, lacking mirrors . . . and at last—
hexagonal, dawn-flushed—the asphodel
burgeons past storied glory on this hill:
brave with the beauty that the temple lost.

Detail on a Street Corner

Herculaneum

I am Phallus, reddened in the antique mode,
rampant in limestone, set in a sunny wall
close to the traffic by the market well:
ironic rubric to make women mad.

Who looks at me shall dream and break her sleep,
though waking put me by. Can I not wait
for moons of drunkenness when I can slip
the stubborn wards that turn the lock of fate?

And henceforth she must praise me with a wreath
before my shrine. I am a mighty god :
who worships me is slave unto my goad ;
but who denies me withers of my wrath.

For Lily Bess Campbell.

