

Lawrence Spingarn Selected Poems



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Spingarn was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, descended on his father's side from Portuguese Jews who had arrived in the U.S. in 1820. (An early book review notes Spingarn's "Quaker-Spanish parentage" and "Maine background.") He was raised in New York City. Poems appeared in the early-40s in Harper's, Poetry and The Saturday Review. Dutton published his first book, *Rococo Summer*, in 1947. It's unclear when he moved west, but he married Sylvia G Wainhouse in Los Angeles in 1949. He taught English at Valley College in Van Nuys and was living in that city when he died.

Rococo Summer, And Other Poems. New York: Dutton, 1947.

The Lost River. London: Heinemann, 1951.

Letters from Exile, and other poems. London: Longman, 1960.

Madame Bidet and Other Fixtures. Van Nuys: Perivale, 1968.

Freeway Problems and Others. Van Nuys: Perivale, 1970.

Poets West: Contemporary Poems from the Eleven Western States. Van Nuys: Perivale, 1975.

The Blue Door: Stories. Van Nuys: Perivale, 1977.

The Dark Playground: Poems. Van Nuys: Perivale, 1979.

Moral Tales. Van Nuys: Perivale, 1983.

Journey to the Interior & Other Stories. Van Nuys: Perivale, 1992.

The Beachcombers

When Circe, whose sly tongue was thick from wine,
Begged cleaner sheets in which to vend stale wares,
Ulysses thrashed her. Wanton by design,
He followed steep and labyrinthine stairs
No dolphin ever trod before it died
Downward to ageing nymphs at coral fairs,
Met drunken Neptune, who broke wind and cried
For mortgaged realms, spent vigor, fallen hairs.
While sailors jounced fat wenches on their laps,
Ulysses puzzled over magic squares.
The weather, omens, mutes in Phrygian caps;
All hands divided into agile pairs.
Heedless and blithe, clad only in loud socks,
They sweated, grunted, worked on equal shares
The silt of pleasure through one narrow box:
Night squandered darkness, but the coin was theirs.
High tide drew baths for cooling fevered lips.
The ocean growled in subterranean lairs.
As cardboard gulls christened the bankrupt ships,
Kelp bound delirious wretches to strict chairs.

A Classic Journey

I played the jokester in those Syrian days,
Dawdling along the shoe-shaped vestibules
Where frantic shoppers with decaying eyes
Rebuked my feet. I boxed with natives twice:
The hairy Greeks and marbled Portuguese
Outlawed my Mediterranean dreams
To grottoed isles of sacerdotal blue.
The bones I dug are fossiled into fame:
Antipater, the vetch-nosed Ptolemy,
Or Heraklita soaking from her pores
The merchant dye that proved her dignity.
A dark-eyed Spartan changed my coins to deeds:
She wore her shield of diffidence to bed
But yoked us with a chaste propinquity
As regents in the dynasty of sleep.
Wars parted us. My safer years racked up
Like saucers for Athenian coffee shops
When I was tourist at the ruins of love.
Now memory clicks within the shuttered dark
Of winter in this northern latitude.

The West

Wyoming is a green and rampant space,
Thanks to the Mormon stint that made it so.
In California grow prodigious grapes.
The Puget fishes quarrel in their nets.
Nevada is a whistle in the wind
Below guilt's finger-pointing Idaho
Hugged by the bear, Montana, and the Snake,
A frantic river fencing Oregon.
Recall the snow-stocked ranches of the Ute.
The pine cone mesas of New Mexico,
The penitents at Denver, coughing blood,
Beaten by whips of red and acrid dust.
The hiker, standing by the Judas tree,
Will pick and choose his Buicks as they pass,
And where the silver dollars bounce like hail
The hennaed dealers spread their dental wares.
While dry conformity had many sons,
The census-taker never came this far
To mark the groves and derricks with his pins.
Your oranges shall fatten on extremes
Larger than legend, yeasty as the sea
Foaming green flattery upon the beach
Of malted milk and cactus real estate
Where tinted post-cards serve as dividends
For squaws and yogis anxious to invest
In Christian Science or a pension plan.
Appease your hunger with the obvious:
The travel-folder missions, Santa Fe,
The tourist boiling in his oil of speed
And Iowa, retired to Hollywood,
For these are totem to your history
Defined by breakers at the Golden Gate.
Pacific is the nickname for the quest,
Gain its red eye and thirst its parching tongue.
Now is too soon to measure such a vast
Oasis in Mohaves of your hope

Where all mirages lead to Panamint,
To fat white haunches of the Mother Lode,
Plateaus of folly, gulches of neglect,
The gin and tonic waves at Malibu.

