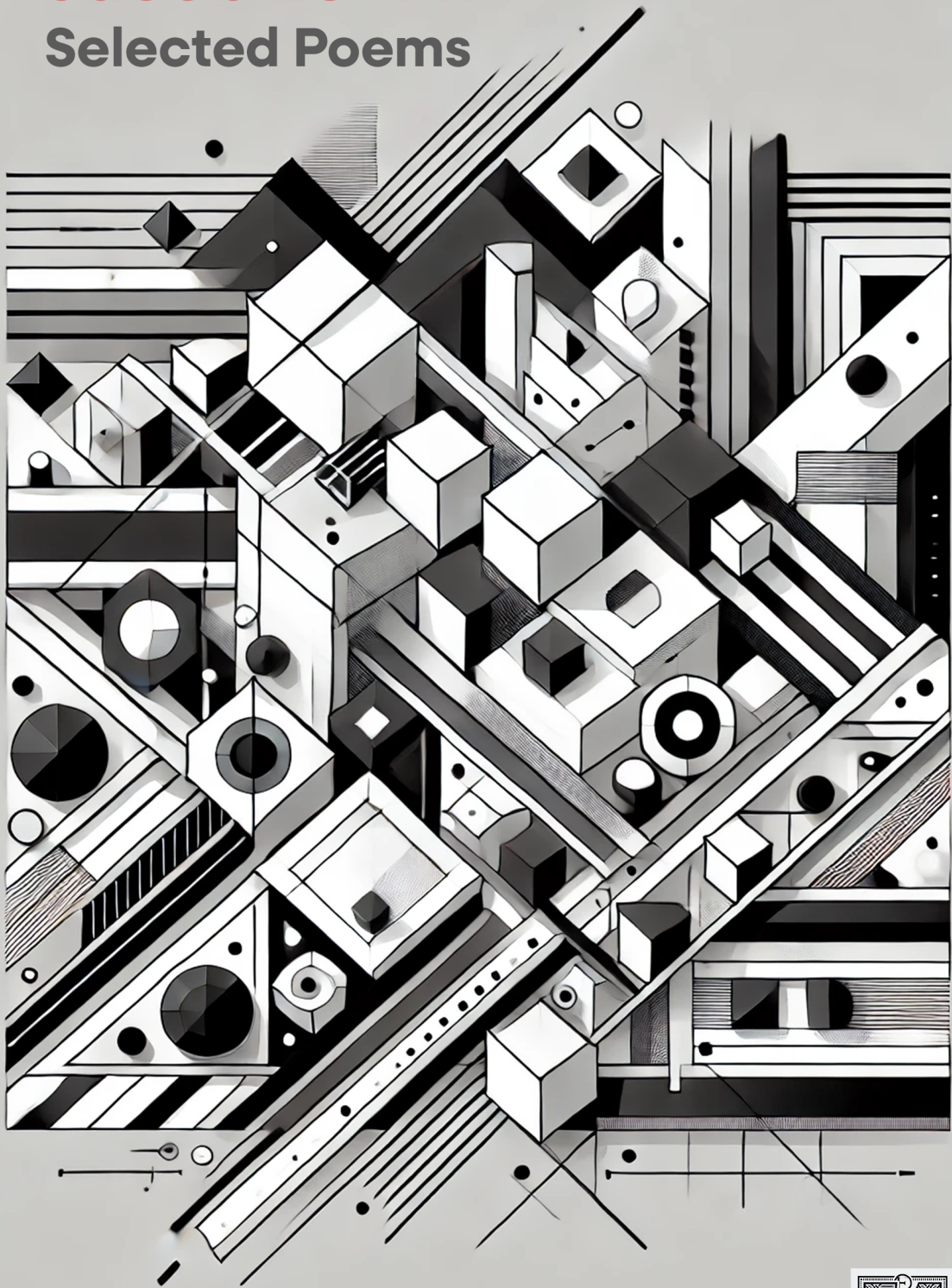


Jacob Zeitlin

Selected Poems



Jacob Israel Zeitlin

November 4, 1902 [Racine, Wisconsin] –
August 30, 1987 [Los Angeles, California]

Zeitlin was born in Racine, Wisconsin. He moved with his family to Fort Worth, Texas in his childhood and to Los Angeles in 1925. He opened his first bookshop in 1928 on Hope Street near 6th Street in downtown Los Angeles, and over the years moved his shop a number of times, its final location being in a converted barn on La Cienega Boulevard. He founded the Primavera Press, to produce fine printed books, and was a co-founder of the Rounce & Coffin Club, which supported and encouraged fine printing in Southern California. He and his many friends and associates, known as the “Zeitlin circle,” were a significant force in the cultural and intellectual life of Los Angeles. In 1963, he testified in a California Supreme Court obscenity hearing on Henry Miller’s novel *Tropic of Cancer*. He was also one of the first people to exhibit the woodcuts of fellow Echo Park resident Paul Landacre and the photographs of Edward Weston. Zeitlin also edited *Opinion*, a short-lived but influential Angeleno intellectual journal.

For Whispers and Chants. San Francisco: The Lantern Press, 1927.

More Whispers and Chants. Pasadena: The Ampersand Press, 1952.

Prairie Flower

I'm glad I never saw you in a city.

There will always be
a bending tree,
a graveled road,
a sleek backed hill,
behind you.

When we meet in a dawn

I shall say,
"You are sweet
As wild bee's honey."

I shall call you
a prairie flower
and a mustang.

For the Lady Never

You—
Sapling-slim
And shadow-naked—
Bent leaf caressed
And sun gilt flanks
Before a jasmine laden wind.

Sweeping
To kiss the valley
Of your coral centered breasts,
I felt your breath,
Made sweeter by a song
Hummed underneath
Your shell pink lips.

Three Ironies

I.

I have watched
Sinuous snakes glide
Through the grass
Or hide
And swing head and tongue
Upward
After whirring grasshoppers.

But yesterday I walked
Where the sun
Threw a flood of dazzling bombs
Upon an autumn day.
There, amid the broken yellow grass,
A dull green grasshopper
Sat solemnly eating
Of a golden-plated serpent.

II.

From the darkness
A white pigeon falls
Through the drizzle
To the cold wet pavement.

We huddle together
Under the arc-light.

Spring of a black gutter cat,
Flutter of white feathers
Beat down to the ground
By the rain.

But I do not interfere.

III.

In October

Brown monarchs came—

Brown-winged,

Clothed in white-spotted velvet.

They fluttered in clouds along each low path,

Filled the creek beds,

And clung to the haw trees—

Clung till they outnumbered the leaves;

Refoliating empty branches.

In the background

A brilliant cardinal—

Black-moustached—

Fluttered and chirped

And fattened.

To a Maker of Masks

With slow malignant gestures
Of your soft and ruthless hands
You have corroded clay
Until the stern and changeless
Masks of truth
Have crept out of chaotic mass
And fixed themselves
Unyieldingly.

You have found
Just that wind-shifting instant
When the stubborn and adamant earth
Reveals the ultimate of sorrow.

How zealously
You have pared all the dross of moods away
Until the chaste and sinister
Last residue

Has shown the naked passion
In its final blinding shape.

Death of the Moon

Last night, the moon,
Sauntering cat-footed
Across a bas-relief sky,
Fell into a bog of clouds.

Slowly the quagmire closed
And left a twisted scar.
Near morning a white corpse rose.
But the moon was dead.

Incomplete

Seeing them
As hard enameled images,
Removed
And impossible of inner contact,
I have thrown my arms
Across men's shoulders
Kissed women's lips,
Embraced their bodies—
Not them.

Train Portrait of an East Texas Farm Woman

There is a question in her deadened eyes
At each new person and a new surprise
Besets her with each movement of the train.
Bald prairie land is new to her long life
As well as endless miles of track that send
Her mind a multitude of ways at once.
Her old rough hands betray the drudgery
Of farm-house tasks that come with poverty:
Her time from bed to bed is over-filled
With toil: Baking, churning, washing, sewing.
The halt and dragging in her walk is proof
Of long, long windy fields and labor done
Alongside of her man beneath the sun,
And too, there is a hint of children borne
In damp cold houses and of death at dawn.

Convict Lake

A Chinese philosopher would
sit on a stone here
and think of what is
immutable.

The pain of such a mountain,
rock climbing over rock,
would make him walk slowly
in the bare elders.

And when the wind brought
snow down
over the slate water
He would close his eyes
and think of running girls
that bent to sting his cheeks
with little kisses.

