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THESPIAN, AND OTHER POEMS

by

William A. Eichelbaugh

Original poetry submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

English

UTAH STATE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
Logan, Utah

1953

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I express appreciation to the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Wallace J. Vickers, Dr. King Hendricks, Dr. Hubert M. Smith, Professor Moyle Q. Rice, and Mrs. Veneta L. Nielsen. I am indebted to Mrs. Nielsen for her constructive criticism. To Dr. King Hendricks, committee chairman, I am deeply grateful for encouragement and understanding, and for making the completion of this thesis possible.

William A. Eichelbaugh

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Thespian	1 —
Beyond	2
Go at Winter's Height	3
The Crowd Is Gone	4
Unseen and Silent	5
Two-gwo-tee Pass	6
Song of the Chimney-Sweep	7
Headstones	8
Sleeping Indian of the Tetons	9
Patterned Shadows	10
Cold Rain	11
Tired Traveler	12
Inborn Cry	13
Bird of the Prairie	14
Thunder God	15
Do Not Speak	16
Tourist Guide	17
The Recluse Heart	18
The Searcher	19 —
Christmas Star	20 —
Phantom of the Dark	21
I See Children	22
To Those Who Would Listen	23
Winging Thoughts	24

Thespian

Do not intrude,
Even though the door—unlocked—
For the smile
I wear today
Will be tomorrow
In the rain. . .
The smiling mask,
The private pain. . .

Beyond

A seeing flame

Burns

Unseen, unheard

In a pit—eternal—

No suns,

No nights. . .

It burns beyond—

Where known songs

Are never sung,

Where all creeds

Are as one.

Go at Winter's Height

Go now—when snow-clouds lift from the forest roof,
When drifts move wraith-like along the
Ground. . .when light

From the stars silhouettes willowed trunks and
Drooping boughs against the sky. . .go,
Go to the woodlands

At winter's height, over the ghostly whiteness. . .
Make no sound. . .do you hear the chorus
Of the wintry dark—

Hear the tinkle of ice-bells above the water's
Sigh, singing a song of incessant love,
Beginning low, rising high,

Do you hear an echoing cry. . .drifting
On the silent wings of night?

The Crowd Is Gone

I stand alone in chill of coming dusk—
among banners trampled and torn by dusty feet.
A timeless wind thumbs pages of an abandoned
program. . .

Misty apparitions charge down-field—
mobs of fanatic unnatural goad phantoms
to feverish rhythm—a haughty victory march
drowns hoarse cries: the blast from brazen horns,
the beat of frantic drums mounts higher, higher!!

Now, as suddenly as it began. . .
no, a night-wind rustles the pages
of the program.

Unseen and Silent

The night-shift steel worker, empty lunch bucket
under-arm, clops heavily beneath drowsy yellow
lights of the 'iron city'. From a cabaret comes
the brass vulgarity of juke-box crooners. . .the
rancid oder of over-used grease from an 'all night
diner'.

He pauses in the doorway of an eyeless side-street flat. . .
the red blade from a match cuts jerky shadows in
a face that cries. . .unseen and silent. . .

The city has no answer.

Two-gwo-tee Pass

There is a freedom there—on Two-gwo-tee Pass—
for thoughts that wander far or near. . .
now where pine murmurs caress the listening ear. . .
now where hurrying streams herd fallen leaves
to some unknown place
(how swift, how sure they race
on waters that bear no trace
that leaves were there.)

There is a freedom there—on Two-gwo-tee Pass—
where wild geese point through chilling air,
as a sun hangs its bursting flare. . .
and now,
Grand Teton is wrapped in twilight clothes. . .
the night moves black on padded toes.
There is a soul-filling freedom there. . .
on Two-gwo-tee Pass.

Song of the Chimney-Sweep

Green blades,
Like a million tiny rapiers,
Lance the lustrous air of spring,
But he---
He cannot come back,
Nor will his peculiar song ever ring---
Ring from the chimney tops. . .
Nor echoes chase themselves
Into the sky.

Will yet another sweep
Take his place
Where only winged ones nest,
Chant his song
And fall resistlessly to rest. . .
While fading strains of melody
Drift lost into the sky?

Spring comes forth
Like an awakening child---
A fresh dawn breeze---
Do the trees. . .oh tell me,
Do the trees
Hear
A faint, quaint song?

Headstones

Time has eaten deep
The metal.
In a weed-filled corner,
The wheels, the axels,
The hollow hulks—like headstones—
Settle. . .

Beyond the gates,
Yes, those beyond the gates
Are young. . .

Here, only the wind. . .only
The wind weeps in passing,
And in weeping,
Whispers among sightless windows.
Tattered, faded fabric—dead flower—
Hangs in ironic limpness. . .

After the wind,
The long silence,
The endless. . .endless silence.

Sleeping Indian of the Tetons

Granite face against the sky-line,
Cold against the flare of sunset—
The sleeping Indian of the Tetons,
Timeless seer of the mountains,
Hears the war-drums,
Hears the pulsing beat of war-drums
Pumping fire through veins of dead men,
Through their veins the blood of centuries.
Sees the transient torch of evening—
Lighting all the graves in heaven.
Sees the phantom-mist of hunters,
Ghost-trails of awakened warriors
Returning with the damp, the darkness,
With the whispered chill, its passing. . .
To the mountains and the prairies,
To the shelter of the forests,
To the firs and fitful waters,
To the land of the Sleeping Indian. . .
To the singer. . .of their glory.

Patterned Shadows

Then---shy leaf patterns danced and played upon the ground,
flitting here then there upon the ground,
light with care and understanding. . .as autumn winds
whispered through the trees. . .there was
beauty then.

Now---thin spider-webbed patterns move silently upon the snow,
slowly here and there upon the snow,
old with care but understanding. . .as winter winds
hang heavy in the trees. . .and there is
beauty still.

Cold Rain

Why. . .

Impulse?

Perhaps. . .had you waited—

Gone out for coffee—

Taken a walk—

You were tired, dog tired, disillusioned. . .sick.

Tomorrow. . .would tomorrow

Have an open window?

An open window. . .cold rain. . .

Mid-afternoon. . .November. . .

An impulse?

I, curious onlooker,

Vision. . .lying in your place. . .

Broken on wet concrete—

Shudder. . .

Cold rain. . .

Tired Traveler

You see the blue fly. . .sluggish and mute. . .

 Clinging to the sun-side of a tree;

Hear winter shaking yellow, waxed leaves—

 Leaves gliding, tumbling to flustered

 Patterns on smothered grass;

Smell the pungence of dying plants

 Spiralling in thin, chill air;

Feel the cold warmth of an October sun

 As it etches meaningful shadows. . .

Before the bells toll... .traveler. . .

 Hear the song of young hearts—

Children are laughing. . .kicking leaves

 In the gutters of streets. . .

They do not see the death of summer.

Inborn Cry

I saw a suckling child against a mother's breast,
 secure in the warm comfort there.

Later, when skinned knees and feelings hurt,
 I heard inborn cries. . ."Mamma!"

I watched convention shackle the impulsive cry
 in a dusty, web-patterned corner of the brain.

I watched a bewildered young man—one of a million
 guiltless men—march away. . .
 the pulsing beat of cadenced feet
 echoing sinless generations.

Eyes, seeing yet sightless, led mechanical men
 into the abyss of time. . .
 a stripling youth fell. . .stiffened. . .

Dust stirred, wind screamed—webbed bars snapped—
 the child. . .an eternal moment. . .
 "skinned knees,
 hurt feelings"
 cried out. . ."Mamma!"

166150

Bird of the Prairie

Why do you fret, killdeer, killdeer?

Anxious wings search here, then there,

Slender legs scamper. . .where,

killdeer
killdeer
killdeer!

Above the muted sage, killdeer, killdeer,

Above the desert's sand-ribbed floor,

A plaintive cry rises. . .evermore,

killdeer
killdeer
killdeer!

I hear you in the night, killdeer, killdeer,

Hear your penetrating call,

But echoes only rise. . .and fall,

killdeer
killdeer
killdeer!

What do you seek, killdeer, killdeer?

Skimming, dodging, diving low,

Bird of the prairie. . .calling so,

killdeer
killdeer
killdeer!

Thunder God

It has passed this way before,
Uttering deep, rumbling tones,
But failed to heed mite prayers,
Or hear dying moans.

It has passed this way before,
Herding clouds burdened with rain,
But didn't share its precious load,
Nor ease the burning pain.

The Thunder God's voice booms above
The troubled hills once more;
A cool, whispering wind steals
Along the valley floor.

Hear me, oh Thunder God! Let your tired herd
Rest upon the hill,
Shower rain on a burning plain,
If drought be not your will!

Do Not Speak

The fitful, rushing snow-water,
racing, driving—carried winter's remnant
to the sea.

A gentle fore-guard laughed through the trees,
cool fingers touched my cheek, my lips,
whispered, "Do no speak!"

"Do not speak. . .see, in blue where washed skies bring
long lines of strong-winged fowl, dark shapes flying,
northward pointing, distant calling dying, dying.

"Do not speak. . .soon delicate hue and lilac scent
will flatter spring—a moment lavender,
too quickly spent—so, do not speak. . .

"No, do not speak. . .words have not ethereal wings
to capture melody. . .
my maiden sings."

Tourist Guide

And now. . .on this side,
Read from the dead gray
Of an old rail fense—

See the dusty wagons lurch,
Mules strain, teamsters sweat,
See steel ribbons creep slowly
Across the prairie,
Hear the clicking rhythm
Of young iron wheels. . .
Feel the brazen pulse
Of stripling cities. . .

The Recluse Heart

I need someone to walk with me
 Beneath the trees, beside the sea;
To note the mystic music in the wind,
 As day begins to flee.

I need someone to see, as I,
 The dying sun. . .the amber sky;
To see black fingers push away the day—
 To hear the night thrush cry.

I need someone whose spirit flares
 At inspiring scenes, someone who dares—
Someone who senses and understands
 The recluse heart that cares.

The Searcher

Swinging slow from unknown hand,
 Along the lake upon the sand,
Little lantern glowing bright,
 Whose footsteps do you guide this night?

Why pause among the weathered stones,
 And harken to the willows' moans;
Was it not a year tonight,
 I saw your beacon's yellow light?

You've searched long here—searched long there,
 Has a long time failed to dim your care,
What's to lose and what's to gain,
 What's your errand. . . joy or pain?

Christmas Star

Christmas brilliant hanging low,
Why pause in flight o'erhead,
Is it because you seek a face
In our empty trundle bed?

I remember how you peeked one night
Through his window pane,
I remember how he hid his hurts,
And did not once complain.

Just before I tucked him in,
He cried, "Daddy, what is there?"
The star that guided wise men, son,
You see its lantern's flare.

After he had lisped his prayers,
With missing words, but childish care,
I brushed a tear from misty eyes,
And tiptoed down the stair.

Again this eve I watch you,
As you swing your lamp o'erhead,
This Christmas night as mystic light
Bathes his trundle bed.

Phantom of the Dark

Slowly and quietly it glides through the grasses,
when daylight folks are lost in sleep, with a
soft, earthly whisper the phantom passes; I hear
ancient pine trees faintly weep— It carries
the faraway screech of an owl, so weird and chilling a
hunting call; carries a dog's guttural and warning
growl, as a sneaking cat climbs an old stone wall. . .

It rustles the rushes along the sleeping sound, and
rocks the red-wing in its reedy nest; ripples the
surface as it moves outward bound, over the waters,
far into the west— When gray streaks of
dawn-light rise in the sky, and the morning songs
of larks ring clear, this phantom of the dark
utters a sleepy sigh. . .but, some other night I
will find it near.

I See Children

I stand where once we spent forbidden hours. . .
children in crisp clothes are laughing,
tumbling on well kept grass, clinging to
a toy merry-go-round, rigid in harnesses swings,
inching down slippery slides. . .

and I remember

An abandoned power-house, its deep, eyeless windows;
the weed-filled coal pit (where they found
the dead tramp); a scrapped trolley car—
curling letters, Indiana Central, peeling
from weathered sides; rain-eaten boilers,
fortresses from feared "sunny side" gangs
(more torn and dirty than we); the dump. . .
rats. . .broken glass and bleeding feet. . .

To Those Who Would Listen

Do you hear it; hear the forest. . .hear its speaking
in the rain-drops; hear the rain-drops in the
tree tops—speaking now to those who listen?

Do you hear it; hear the thunder. . .hear its rumbling
through the skyways; hear it rumbling, herding
always—herding clouds into the distance?

Do you hear it; hear the minstrel. . .hear its singing
in the fir tree; mystic songs that often haunt me—
along twilight trails of shadow?

Do you hear it; hear the water. . .hear the river in
its sighing; hear it sighing, laughing, crying—
on the pebbled, moonlit shoreline?

Do you hear it; hear the west wind. . .hear its rustling
in the grasses; rustling, playing as it passes—
hurrying to other woodlands?

It is wilderness that you hear speaking; speaking
just to those who listen. . .with its searching
eyes that glisten—speaking from the boughs of cedars. . .

It is wilderness that you hear speaking; even in
its silence talking; even in its splendor walking. . .
whispering, gliding among the shadows.

Winging Thoughts

A trailing torch tumbles into the sea,
While a thousand eyes
Follow its flight,
Lonely songs escape from a naked tree,
From its clutching fingers
Against the night,
And as I tread on beaded dew. . . .
My thoughts wing on. . .