



Photograph by Marion Ettlinger.

INTRODUCTION

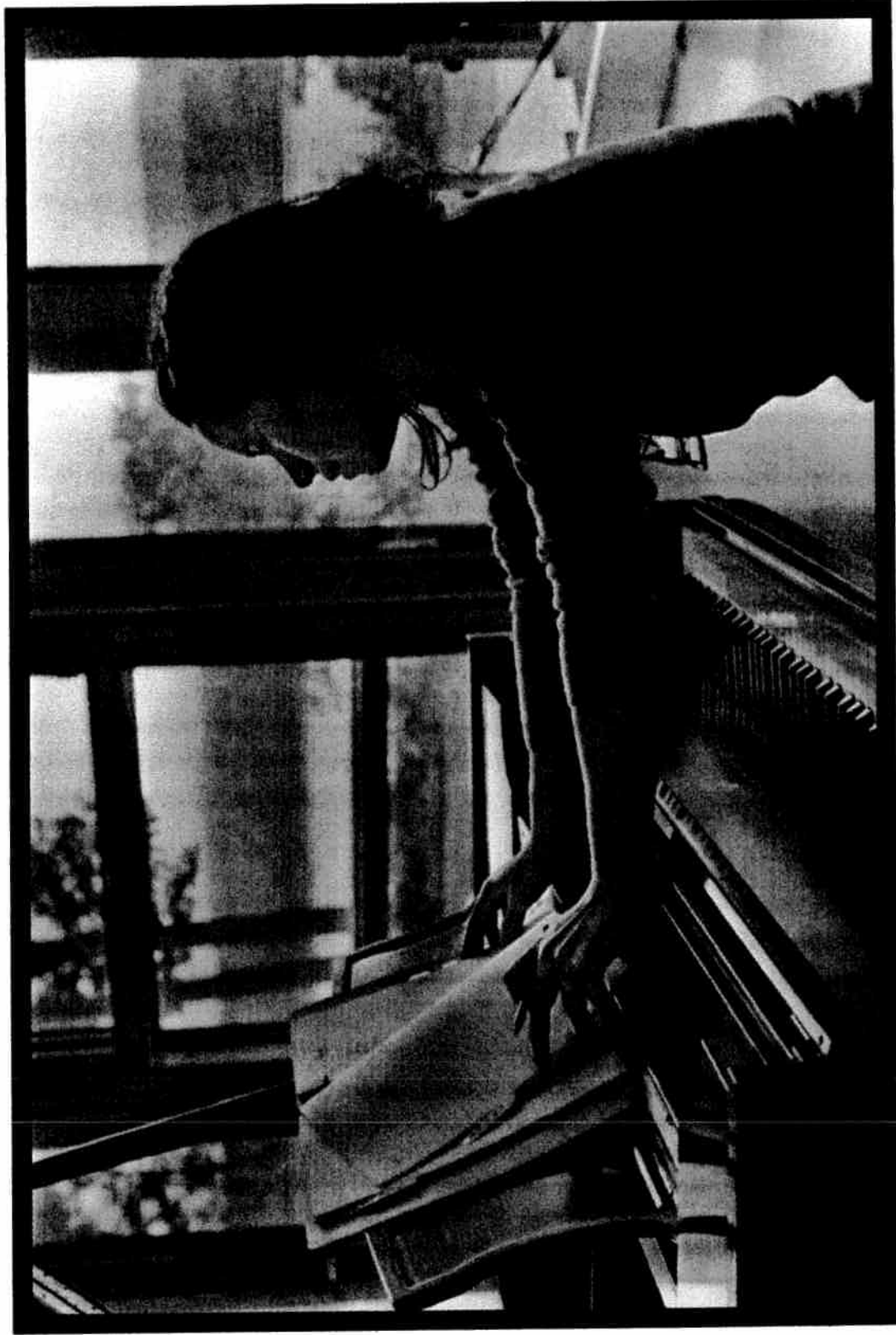
This collection of songs represents parts of a long conversation I've had with my daughter during the first six years of her life. It documents our word-of-mouth tradition in the poems, stories, and songs that I found to delight and teach her. I pulled these obscure and eccentric poems off their flat, yellowed pages and brought them to life for her. I willed into being this parade of witches and fearless girls, blind men and elephants, giants and sailors and gypsies, floating churches, dancing bears, circus ponies, a Chinese princess and a janitor's boy, and so many others. I tried to show her that speech could be the most delightful toy in her possession and that her mother tongue is rich with musical rhythms and rhymes. I gave her parables with lessons in human nature and bits of nonsense to challenge the natural order of things and sharpen her wit. These poems speak of so many things: longing and sadness, joy and beauty, hope and disillusionment. Grave or absurd, these are the things that make a childhood, that time when we wake up to the great wonders and small terrors of this beautiful—horrible world of ours.

In spite of the fact that I have written song lyrics for thirty years, I'd never considered myself a poet or gave much of my time to reading poetry. I'm a late convert to the art form but now I understand that poets are our soft-spoken clairvoyants. They tell us about the things that have made us and keep us human. Poets are keepers of the sacred language that describes our holy places — unknown and unknowable. The poet holds the mirror that reflects the true shape and touch and taste and sound of all the things that bind us together and keep us apart. The poet's work is putting silence around everything worth remembering. Poetry on the page can be difficult to penetrate; sometimes it needs to be heard. I used music to enter these poems, and once inside I was able to understand how they were constructed with layers of feeling and meaning.

Five years of research and writing went into *Leave Your Sleep*. It is the most ambitious project I have ever attempted or even dared to conceive. I wrote over fifty of these poem-songs until the process consumed me. Over time my curiosity about the lives of the poets included in my anthology grew. So I read biographical accounts and letters, searched archives, and contacted heirs, executors, or the poets themselves in an attempt to know more about my co-writers. Although it's impossible to sum up a life in 500 words or less and a single portrait, some of what I learned and found is included in this package.

The research and writing only account for a portion of the labor and love put into this project. I collaborated with over a hundred talented musicians and a small, dedicated team of recording technicians over the course of a full year to realize my vision of these poems. I could not have taken on this project without the help of others, and I am in debt to everyone who believed in and contributed to the making of *Leave Your Sleep*.

—Natalie Merchant, January 2010



Photograph by Marion Ettlinger.

PART I
LEAVE YOUR SUPPER

1. Nursery Rhyme of Innocence and Experience

Charles Causley (1917–2003)

BRITISH

I had a silver penny

And an apricot tree

And I said to the sailor

On the white quay

'Sailor O sailor

Will you bring me

If I give you my penny

And my apricot tree

'A fez from Algeria

An Arab drum to beat

A little gilt sword

And a parakeet?'

And he smiled and he kissed me

As strong as death

And I saw his red tongue

And I felt his sweet breath

'You may keep your penny

And your apricot tree

And I'll bring your presents
Back from sea.'

*O the ship dipped down
On the rim of the sky
And I waited while three
Long summers went by*

*Then one steel morning
On the white quay
I saw a grey ship
Come in from sea*

*Slowly she came
Across the bay
For her flashing rigging
Was shot away*

*All round her wake
The seabirds cried
And flew in and out
Of the hole in her side*

*Slowly she came
In the path of the sun
And I heard the sound
Of a distant gun*

*And a stranger came running
Up to me
From the deck of the ship
And he said, said he*

'O are you the boy
Who would wait on the quay
With the silver penny
And the apricot tree?

'I've a plum-coloured fez
And a drum for thee
And a sword and a parakeet
From over the sea.'

*'O where is the sailor
With bold red hair?
And what is that volley
On the bright air?*

*'O where are the other
Girls and boys?
And why have you brought me
Children's toys?'*

Charles Causley was born in Launceston, a small town in the north of Cornwall, England, and with the exception of military service and travel, he never lived anywhere else. His poetry is filled with images of the sea and coastal life, with references to local legends and ballads. The son of a gardener and a domestic servant, Charles attended a local grammar school on scholarship. Precocious in his literary talent, he began his first novel at the age of nine. At fifteen he left school to become a laborer, but despite being cut off from a formal education Causley continued writing and reading poetry. Throughout his career as a poet, Causley wrote against the grain, preferring lyric ballads and descriptive, narrative poems with a style and form that recalled nineteenth-century poetry. He used traditional rhyme and meter in contrast to the experimentation of the modernist poets who were his contemporaries. Because of these qualities, I found his poems became lyrics very naturally.

A frequent theme in Causley's poetry is war and its aftermath. During his boyhood in Cornwall he was surrounded by many sick, injured, and traumatized soldiers returning home from the First World War. When Charles was only seven, his own father died a slow and painful death of complications from tuberculosis contracted in the trenches. Causley himself served in the Royal Navy during World War II for six years. Witnessing the deaths of his friends and comrades had a profound effect on his literary path. Although he published a novel based on his wartime experiences, his reaction to war caused him to turn away from drama and prose and to concentrate on poetry. His first collection of verse, *Farewell, Aggie Weston*, was published in 1951. It was in this volume of work that his poem "Nursery Rhyme of Innocence and Experience" first appeared. Many such poems by Causley are deceptively simple; he believed that a poem didn't need to be complicated or abstract in order to be complex. He once explained, "The mere fact of a poem appearing simple in language and construction bears no relation whatsoever to the profundity of ideas it may contain." I couldn't agree more.



Charles Causley photograph courtesy of Special Collections, University of Exeter and the Estate of Charles Causley.

2. Equestrienne

Rachel Field (1894–1942)

AMERICAN

*See, they are clearing the sawdust course
For the girl in pink on the milk-white horse.
Her spangles twinkle; his pale flanks shine,
Every hair of his tail is fine
And bright as a comet's; his mane blows free,
And she points a toe and bends a knee,
And while his hoofbeats fall like rain
Over and over and over again.
And nothing that moves on land or sea
Will seem so beautiful to me
As the girl in pink on the milk-white horse
Cantering over the sawdust course.*

I was shocked to learn that the poet and author Rachel Field could not read fluently until the age of ten. Her mother, widowed when Rachel was less than a year old, perpetually read aloud to her only child. With her uncanny memory, she was able to recite lines perfectly after just one listen. It's thought that this oral introduction to literature might have developed her keen sense of detail, rhythm, measure, and dramatic timing.

All throughout grammar and secondary school Rachel was challenged academically, but she was accepted to Radcliffe College as a special student on the strength of her exceptional talent for writing. While there, she had three plays published and performed, and they were enthusiastically received. In 1918 Rachel did graduate and then moved to New York City, where she wrote her first novel while holding a day-job writing treatments for a silent-movie company. Following a series of rejections, her first volume of poetry for children, *The Pointed People: Verses and Silhouettes*, was published in 1924,

and her career took off. She published fifteen books in the next six years, and in 1930 Field was the first woman to win the Newberry Medal for her children's novel *Hitty, Her First Hundred Years*. In that same year, the beautiful verses of "Equestrienne" were first printed as part of a longer poem, *A Circus Garland*. I understand that she was also a talented illustrator using quill-pen and reed-bush as well as black-pen-outline techniques.

At the age of forty-one Field married literary agent Arthur Pederson and together they moved to Beverly Hills, California, and adopted an infant girl they named Hannah. Not long after, her novel *All This and Heaven Too* became a bestseller and in 1940 was adapted into a film starring Bette Davis. The success of this film allowed Field to dedicate herself to motherhood and writing. Tragically, Rachel Field died at the age of forty-seven following an operation for cancer, complicated by pneumonia. The poems she had written to Hannah were collected and published posthumously in *Prayer for a Child*.



Rachel Field photograph by Ben Pinchot from The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

3. Calico Pie

Edward Lear (1812-1888)

BRITISH

Calico Pie,

The little Birds fly

Down to the calico tree,

Their wings were blue

And they sang 'Tilly-loo!'

Till away they flew;—

And they never came back to me!

They never came back!

They never came back!

They never came back to me!

Calico Jam,

The little Fish swam,

Over the syllabub sea,

He took off his hat,

To the Sole and the Sprat,

And the Willeby-Wat,—

But he never came back to me!

He never came back!

He never came back!

He never came back to me!

Calico Ban,

The little Mice ran,

To be ready in time for tea,

Flippity flup,

*They drank it all up,
And danced in the cup,—
But they never came back to me!
They never came back!
They never came back!
They never came back to me!*

*Calico Drum,
The Grasshoppers come,
The Butterfly, Beetle, and Bee,
Over the ground,
Around and around,
With a hop and a bound,—
But they never came back to me!
They never came back!
They never came back!
They never came back to me!*

Long before the start of this poetry and music project, one of my favorite parlor games was passing *Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense* around the dining-room table and taking turns with friends reading his poems and limericks aloud. “The Quangle Wangle’s Hat,” “The Pobble Who Has No Toes,” and “The Scroobious Pip” would invariably delight. I also loved to pore over his illustrations, strange enough to rival any Dadaist’s. Lear was a genius, the undisputed master of nonsense with the profile of the quintessential British eccentric.

On May 12, 1812, the twentieth child of twenty-one children was born to Ann Skerrit Lear and Jeremiah Lear. When the boy was only a tender four-year-old, Edward’s father experienced a “reversal of fortune” and was placed in a debtors’ prison. Little Edward was raised by his sister Ann, who was twenty-two years his senior and never married. Despite Ann’s kindness, his abandonment and chronic illnesses (epilepsy, respiratory problems, poor eyesight, and acute depression) made for a childhood of

painful insecurity and misery. From the age of fifteen Edward earned his living by drawing, eventually working at the London Zoological Society making drawings of exotic birds. It was a portfolio of his parrot lithographs that brought him to the attention of the thirteenth Earl of Derby, Lord Stanley, and their meeting changed the course of his life.



Edward Lear photograph from Houghton Library, Harvard University (MS Typ 55.10).

Lord Stanley invited Lear to document part of his private menagerie of 1,272 birds and 345 mammals at his sprawling country estate, Knowsley Hall, Lancashire. In addition to his artistic talents, the entire family at Knowsley appreciated Lear's wit and humor. His first book of nonsense was written for and published by the Earl of Derby. After living on the estate for five years, Lear's eyesight was deteriorating; Lord Stanley generously sent him to Rome for a cure and a course in painting. A lifelong wanderlust began with this trip until Lear eventually became a habitual wanderer. Though naturally timid, as a traveler he was intrepid. His expeditions took him to Greece, Albania, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, India, and Ceylon. He sketched and painted the landscapes he encountered with great accuracy and later published them in journal form.

Lear's life as an expatriate bachelor with homosexual tendencies in Victorian society was that of an outsider. The longest intimate relationship he maintained was with his Albanian servant of thirty years, Giorgio Cocali; both Cocali and his son Nicola share his burial plot in San Remo, Italy. Although Lear was never to have a family of his own he had many dear and influential friends. His talents and charm convinced Queen Victoria to request that he give her drawing lessons.

"Dear for his many gifts to many souls," was carved into his headstone. I've officially taken Edward Lear to be my "Adopty Nuncle" and I hope he doesn't mind that I lifted "Calico Pie" from the pages of his *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabets* and set it to music.

4. Bleezer's Ice-Cream
Jack Prelutsky (1940—)
AMERICAN

*I am Ebenezer Bleezer,
I run BLEEZER'S ICE-CREAM STORE,
there are flavors in my freezer
you have never seen before,
twenty-eight divine creations
too delicious to resist,
why not do yourself a favor,
try the flavors on my list.*

COCOA MOCHA MACARONI
TAPIOCA SMOKED BOLONEY
CHECKERBERRY CHEDDAR CHEW
CHICKEN CHERRY HONEYDEW
TUTTI-FRUTTI STEWED TOMATO
TUNA TACO BAKED POTATO
LOBSTER LITCHI LIMA BEAN
MOZZARELLA MANGOSTEEN
ALMOND HAM MERINGUE SALAMI
YAM ANCHOVY PRUNE PASTRAMI
SASSAFRAS SOUVLAKI HASH
SUKIYAKI SUCCOTASH
BUTTER BRICKLE PEPPER PICKLE
POMEGRANATE PUMPERNICKEL
PEACH PIMENTO PIZZA PLUM
PEANUT PUMPKIN BUBBLEGUM

AVOCADO BRUSSELS SPROUT
PERIWINKLE SAUERKRAUT
BROCCOLI BANANA BLUSTER
CHOCOLATE CHOP SUEY CLUSTER
COTTON CANDY CARROT CUSTARD
CAULIFLOWER COLA MUSTARD
ONION DUMPLING DOUBLE DIP
TURNIP TRUFFLE TRIPLE FLIP
GARLIC GUMBO GRAVY GUAVA
LENTIL LEMON LIVER LAVA
ORANGE OLIVE BAGEL BEET
WATERMELON WAFFLE WHEAT

I am Ebenezer Bleezer,

I run BLEEZER'S ICE-CREAM STORE,

taste a flavor from my freezer,

you will surely ask for more.

twenty-eight divine creations

too delicious to resist,

come on, do yourself a favor,

try the flavors on my list.

Jack Prelutsky was born in 1940 in New York and grew up with his younger brother and parents in a working-class neighborhood made up of Jewish, Irish, and Italian families in the Bronx. "My father's name was Charles and my mother's was Dorothea but everybody called them Charlie and Dottie. Our six-floor apartment building was like a little village." His mother stayed home to raise two challenging young boys while his father worked as an electrician and a radio/TV repairman. He graduated from the High School of Music & Art as a voice student and later attended Hunter College.

A coffeehouse folk singer and guitar player, Prelutsky was involved in the Greenwich Village folk music scene from the late '50s well into the '60s. The wonderful photograph of him as a Beat-hipster with a carnation clenched in his teeth leaning against a lamppost is from that period. He worked at the Folklore Center where he helped put on Bob Dylan's first New York concert. He was also the first artist to sing a Dylan song on the radio. When I asked him about the connection, he said, "I was friends with Dylan, Shel Silverstein, Phil Ochs, Peter Yarrow, and Ramblin' Jack Elliott, among others. Joan Baez borrowed five dollars from me and never paid me back but she probably doesn't remember me." Although he never recorded during his folk heydays he has since set many of his poems to music and recorded them.

Although he always enjoyed playing with language, Prelutsky discovered writing as a career only by accident in his early twenties after he'd spent months on a project that involved drawings of fantastical animals. He decided one night to write a little poem to describe each. After a friend encouraged him to show the poems to an editor, he was surprised to find that the she thought he had a talent for writing verse. "Susan Hirschman told me I was the worst artist she'd ever seen, but a natural poet." She encouraged him to start writing, published his first book, and remained his editor for thirty-seven years, until she retired.

Prelutsky published his first book in 1967 but it wasn't until the early 1980s that he gained a wider audience by editing a comprehensive anthology, *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. This anthology was followed by a collection of 100 original poems, *The New Kid on the Block*, including "Bleezer's Ice-Cream." After many more books established him as a major figure in children's literature, Jack Prelutsky was named the first Children's Poet Laureate of America in 2006.



Jack Prelutsky photograph courtesy of the poet.

6. The King of China's Daughter
(Anonymous)

BRITISH

The king of China's daughter

So beautiful to see

With her face like yellow water,

Left her nutmeg tree.

Her little rope for skipping

She kissed and gave it me

Made of painted notes of singing-birds

Among the fields of tea.

I skipped across the nutmeg grove

I skipped across the sea;

But neither sun nor moon, my dear,

Has yet caught me.

7. The Dancing Bear
Albert Bigelow Paine (1861–1937)
AMERICAN

*Oh, it's fiddle-de-dum and fiddle-de-dee,
The dancing bear ran away with me;
For the organ-grinder he came to town
With a jolly old bear in a coat of brown.
And the funny old chap joined hands with me,
While I cut a caper and so did he.
Then 'twas fiddle-de-dum and fiddle-de-dee,
I looked at him, and he winked at me,
And I whispered a word in his shaggy ear,
And I said, "I will go with you, my dear."*

*Then the dancing bear he smiled and said,
Well, he didn't say much, but he nodded his head,
As the organ-grinder began to play
"Over the hills and far away."
With a fiddle-de-dum and a fiddle-de-dee;
Oh, I looked at him and he winked at me,
And my heart was light and the day was fair,
And away I went with the dancing bear.*

*Oh, 'tis fiddle-de-dum and fiddle-de-dee,
The dancing bear came back with me;
For the sugar-plum trees were stripped and bare,
And we couldn't find cookies anywhere.
And the solemn old fellow he sighed and said,
Well, he didn't say much, but he shook his head,*

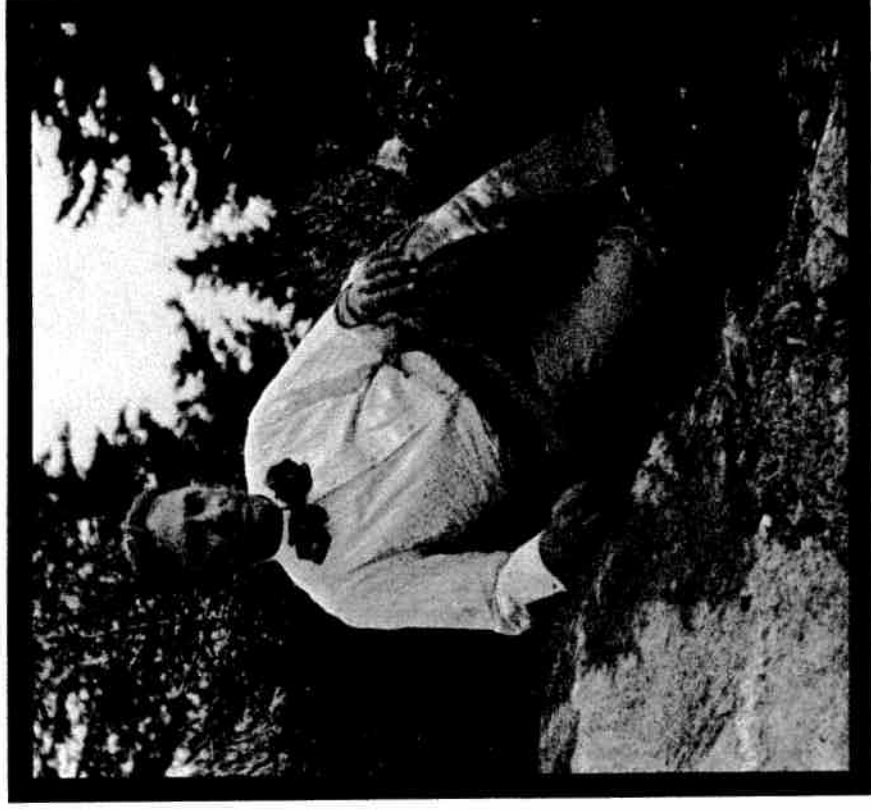
*While I looked at him and he blinked at me
Till I shed a tear and so did he;
And both of us thought of our supper that lay
Over the hills and far away.
Then the dancing bear he took my hand,
And we hurried away through the twilight land;
And 'twas fiddle-de-dum and fiddle-de-dee
When the dancing bear came back with me.*

Albert Bigelow Paine was the fifth child of New England shopkeepers Samuel and Mercy Paine. When Albert was only one year old, his family moved west to Iowa, where his father bought a farm and a store but soon enlisted as a Union soldier in the Civil War. After the war the Paine family moved again, this time to Illinois, where Albert spent the remainder of his childhood; his only education was received in a one-room schoolhouse. At the age of twenty he left for St. Louis to study photography and then traveled extensively throughout the American South, making portraits to fund his travels.

Paine founded a photographic supply company in Fort Scott, Kansas, and in 1892 he married a woman named Dora Locey, and the couple had four daughters: Louise, Frances, Eleanor, and Joy. During his years in Kansas, Paine began experimenting in both verse and prose. His first book of poetry, *Rhymes by Two Friends* (1893), was co-written with William Allan White and included his poem of adventure and disillusionment “The Dancing Bear.” Paine sold his business in Kansas and moved his family to New York City to write full-time. In 1904 he published a biography of the editorial cartoonist Thomas Nast, and during his research for the book there was a fateful encounter with author Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens). The two gentlemen became fast friends and Clemens asked Paine to write his biography. The pair became so close that the Paine family moved near the Clemenses’ home in Redding, Connecticut. Albert soon found himself responsible for almost all aspects of Clemens’s personal life, from reading to him at night to eventually making the arrangements for his funeral. After Clemens’s death, in 1910, Paine published his massive three-volume, nearly half-million-word biography. The work has been widely criticized for “sanitizing” Twain’s image. During his quarter

century as Mark Twain's literary executor, Paine allegedly restricted access to his friend's papers and actively discouraged further biographical research into the famous writer's life. In addition to the authorized biography, Paine also "polished" *Mark Twain's Autobiography*, and then published *Mark Twain's Letters* and *Mark Twain's Notebooks*.

I was fascinated to find that Paine's daughter Louise became one of the first "Angelfish" (a group of surrogate granddaughters to Mark Twain who would accompany him on holidays, to the theater, dinners, billiards, country outings, etc.). Twain was long haunted by the memory of his beloved daughter Susy, who died of meningitis at the age of twenty-four in 1886, and after the death of his wife, Olivia, in 1904, he began to take solace from the company of his Angelfish.



Albert Bigelow Paine photograph courtesy of The Mark Twain Project, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (ABP 1906).

9. maggie and milly and molly and may

E. E. Cummings (1894–1962)

AMERICAN

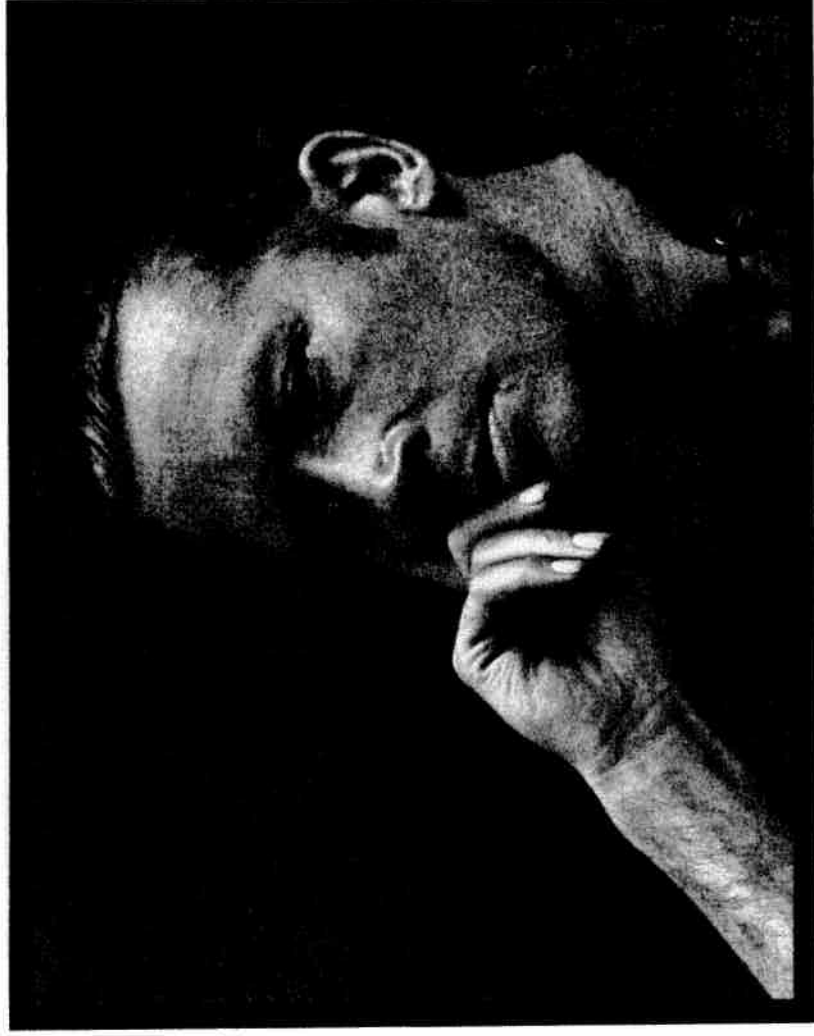
*maggie and milly and molly and may
went down to the beach (to play one day)
and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and
milly befriended a stranded star
whose rays five languid fingers were;
and molly was chased by a horrible thing
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and
may came home with a smooth round stone
as small as a world and as large as alone.
For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves we find in the sea*

Edward Estlin Cummings was born and raised in the orbit of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father was a professor of Sociology and Political Science and a Unitarian minister. Estlin, as he was called, attended Cambridge Latin School, and received both a bachelor's and a master's degree in Classical Studies and English from Harvard. Just after World War I he rechristened himself E. E. Cummings and began writing his poetry, known for its minimalism and novel stylistic eccentricities (primarily unorthodox capitalization and punctuation). Considering his background, he knew every rule he was breaking with what he called his “firstness.”

His work was first championed by the cultural journal *The Dial*, founded and edited by his friend Scofield Thayer, but I'm interested in an even more intimate connection between these two men.

Cummings had an affair with Thayer's wife, Elaine Orr, and a daughter named Nancy was the result, born in 1919. Although a divorce was obtained in France the following year, it wasn't until Nancy was four years old that her biological parents married and Cummings officially adopted her. The marriage lasted only nine months and ended when Elaine fell in love with a wealthy Irish banker on a trans-Atlantic voyage. Estlin was distraught, threatening suicide with a loaded pistol in front of his wife, but she was determined to leave him. In the passion of the moment, Cummings did not legally secure his rights to custody. His daughter was never told about the adoption and grew up in Ireland with the surname Thayer. Cummings did not see his daughter for two decades, and it wasn't until she was nearly thirty and a mother herself that she discovered the truth of her birth. During one of their strained and infrequent visits Cummings casually asked, "Did anyone ever tell you I was your father?" I read that Cummings never allowed his daughter to address him as "father," always reminding her that his name was Estlin.

With the poem "maggie and milly and molly and may" (95 *Poems*, 1958), Cummings created an intimate series of portraits of four little girls discovering themselves through their encounters with nature. I was struck by how simple and insightful the poem is, and I was curious to know if Cummings ever had children of his own. In just scratching the surface of his life I found this one lost and unrequited daughter.



E. E. Cummings 1935 photograph by Edward Weston © 1981 Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents.

11. The Sleepy Giant
Charles Edward Carryl (1841–1920)
AMERICAN

*My age is three hundred and seventy-two,
And I think, with the deepest regret,
How I used to pick up and voraciously chew
The dear little boys whom I met.
I've eaten them raw, in their holiday suits;
I've eaten them curried with rice;
I've eaten them baked, in their jackets and boots,
And found them exceedingly nice.
But now that my jaws are too weak for such fare,
I think it exceedingly rude
To do such a thing, when I'm quite well aware
Little boys do not like to be chewed.
And so I contentedly live upon eels,
And try to do nothing amiss,
And I pass all the time I can spare from my meals
In innocent slumber—like this.*

Very little is known about the personal life of Charles E. Carryl, author of the widely praised and anthologized poems “The Walloping Window Blind” and “The Sleepy Giant.” Sadly, his books are out of print today, which is astonishing considering that *Davy and the Goblin* (1884) was one of the most popular American children’s books of the late nineteenth century. In the book, an eight-year-old Davy falls asleep by the fireside on Christmas Eve and is awakened and escorted by a mischievous goblin on a “Believing Voyage” inside a flying grandfather clock. Davy moves through a series of

strange, dreamlike encounters. He meets with a mixture of well-known figures from juvenile literature as well as an odd cast of original characters: The Hole-Keeper (a two dimensional sentinel made of clear lemon candy), The Ethiopian Serenader singing in a garden of feather-duster trees, and a 372-year-old Giant Badorful who only speaks in rhyming couplets.

It's hard to imagine Carryl, the sensible broker employed by the New York Stock Exchange, creating his galloping rhythmic wordplay and bizarre, fantastical adventures. He was a cultured and savvy businessman who focused his writings on stock transfers and memorandums by day but in the evenings, inspired by his children, inhabited an entirely different world. Sadly, his career as a writer of children's books ended after his two children had outgrown them. These tender words of dedication to his son, Guy, acknowledged the source of his inspiration:

*Dear little boy, upon these pages find
The tangled fancies of thy father's mind,
Born of the hours when thou, a little child,
Throned on his knee in breathless
rapture smiled.*



Charles E. Carryl photograph courtesy New York Stock Exchange Archives, NYSE Euronext.

12. The Peppery Man
Arthur Macy (1842–1904)
AMERICAN

*The Peppery Man was cross and thin;
He scolded out and scolded in;
He shook his fist, his hair he tore;
He stamped his feet and slammed the door.*

*Heigh ho, the Peppery Man,
The rabid, crabbed Peppery Man!
Oh, never since the world began
Was any one like the Peppery Man.*

*His ugly temper was so sour
He often scolded for an hour;
He gnashed his teeth and stormed and scowled,
He snapped and snarled and yelled and howled.*

*He wore a fierce and savage frown;
He scolded up and scolded down;
He scolded over field and glen,
And then he scolded back again.*

*His neighbors, when they heard his roars,
Closed their blinds and locked their doors,
Shut their windows, sought their beds,
Stopped their ears and covered their heads.*

*He fretted, chafed, and boiled and fumed;
With fiery rage he was consumed,*

*And no one knew, when he was vexed,
What in the world would happen next.*

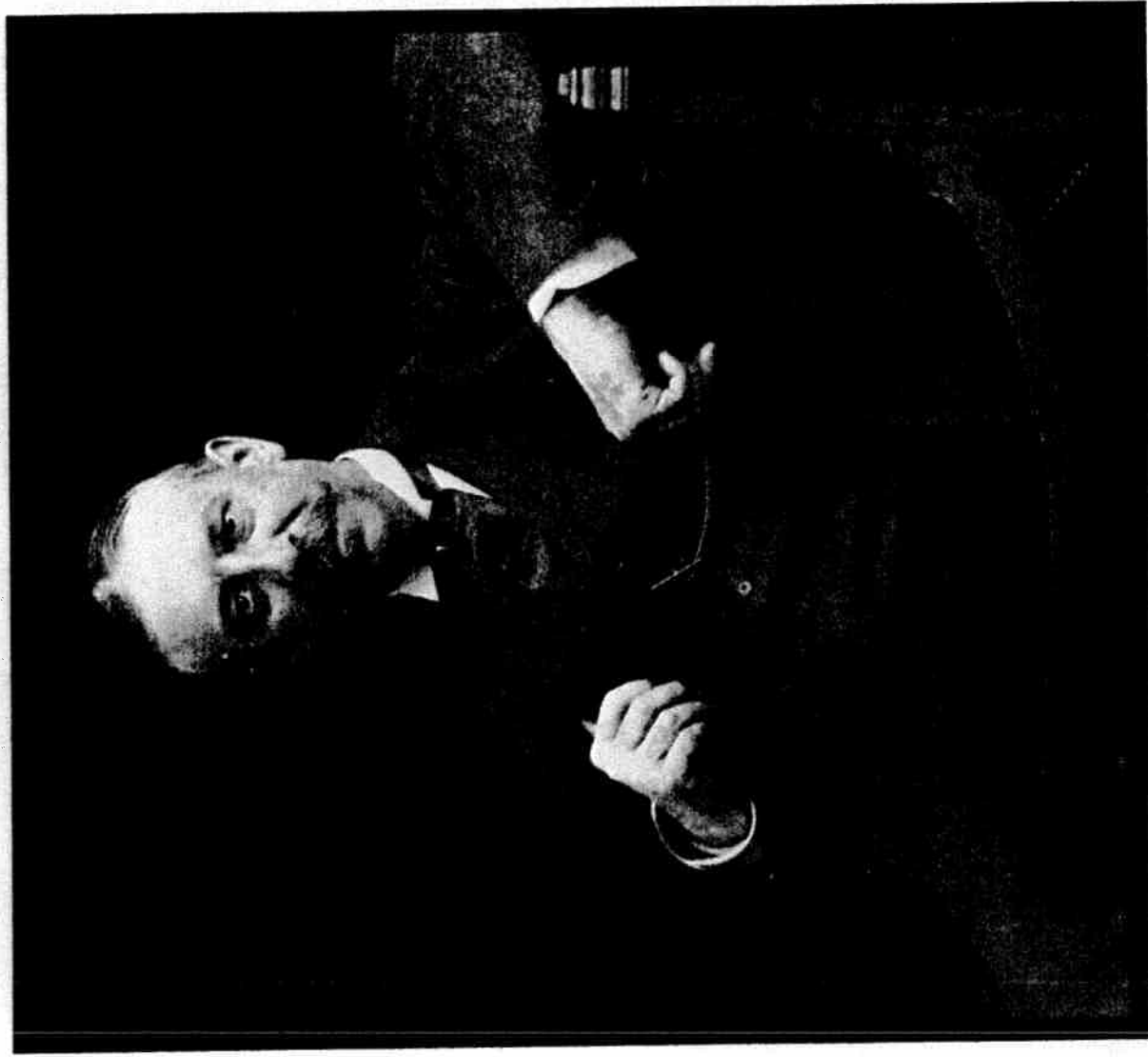
*Heigh ho, the Peppery Man,
The rabid, crabbed Peppery Man!
Oh, never since the world began
Was any one like the Peppery Man.*

Arthur Macy is one of the least known and studied poets of the nineteenth century and the most obscure in my anthology. Macy never published any of his poems because he considered them silly diversions, but luckily his wife and close friends felt differently and saw that a collection of over fifty of his poems was published shortly after his death, in 1904. Aside from the lyrics to a few popular ballads, this single collection of poems is all that survives of Macy's artistry. The cantankerous character that he created with "The Peppery Man" is from the pages of this posthumous collection.

Arthur Macy was born on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts, on February 15, 1842, to Oliver Macy and his wife, Phoebe Fowler Powell. The Macy clan had thrived for generations on the island because of the whaling business, but by the middle of the nineteenth century they found themselves with a distinguished name but little opportunity to prosper. So in 1846 Oliver Macy moved his family to Detroit, Michigan, where they became well respected within the community but continued to struggle financially. When the Civil War broke out, nineteen-year-old Macy enlisted in the Union Army. Wounded the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, he was taken prisoner by the Confederate Army. He remained in Pennsylvania for the remainder of the war, serving as a nurse and doctor's assistant in various makeshift hospitals.

After the war, Macy married and moved to Boston. There he found employment with one of the largest commercial agencies in New England, charged with advising loan companies on the credit-worthiness of potential borrowers. Trusted as a discreet judge of character by friends and colleagues, Macy was known as a genial man, always cheerful and welcoming but frank in his relationships. He was a loyal member of a gentlemen's club where one such acquaintance, William Alfred Hovey (an editor for *Harper's Magazine*), wrote the introduction for the sole book of his poems.

Aside from his wartime injuries and trauma, Macy's life story scans like the surface of a placid lake until 1880, when suddenly, tragically, and, to us, mysteriously, both of his sons died on the same day. I don't know a single detail of this terrible day – I don't even dare to imagine one.



Arthur Macy photograph courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association (P7201).

PART II
LEAVE YOUR SLEEP

14. Adventures of Isabel
Ogden Nash (1902–1971)
AMERICAN

*Isabel met an enormous bear,
Isabel, Isabel, didn't care;
The bear was hungry, the bear was ravenous,
The bear's big mouth was cruel and cavernous.
The bear said, Isabel, glad to meet you,
How do, Isabel, now I'll eat you!
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She washed her hands and she straightened her hair up,
Then Isabel quietly ate the bear up.*

*Once in a night as black as pitch
Isabel met a wicked old witch.
The witch's face was cross and wrinkled,
The witch's gums with teeth were sprinkled.
Ho, ho, Isabel! the old witch crowed,
I'll turn you into an ugly toad!
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry,
She showed no rage and she showed no rancor,
But she turned the witch into milk and drank her.*

*Isabel met a hideous giant,
Isabel continued self-reliant.
The giant was hairy, the giant was horrid,
He had one eye in the middle of his forehead.
Good morning Isabel, the giant said,
I'll grind your bones to make my bread.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She nibbled the zwieback that she always fed off,
And when it was gone, she cut the giant's head off.*

*Isabel met a troublesome doctor,
He punched and he poked till he really shocked her.
The doctor's talk was of coughs and chills
And the doctor's satchel bulged with pills.
The doctor said unto Isabel,
Swallow this, it will make you well.
Isabel, Isabel, didn't worry,
Isabel didn't scream or scurry.
She took those pills from the pill concocter,
And Isabel calmly cured the doctor.*

When I see the congenial face of Ogden Nash I can't help thinking it's cocktail hour in a paneled den with cut-glass bowls of salted nuts on the bar and the air blue with cigar smoke. Someone is softly crooning from the Great American Songbook while witty quips and puns are flowing from the lips of the "the laureate of light verse," including such pithy phrases as "Candy is dandy but liquor is quicker."

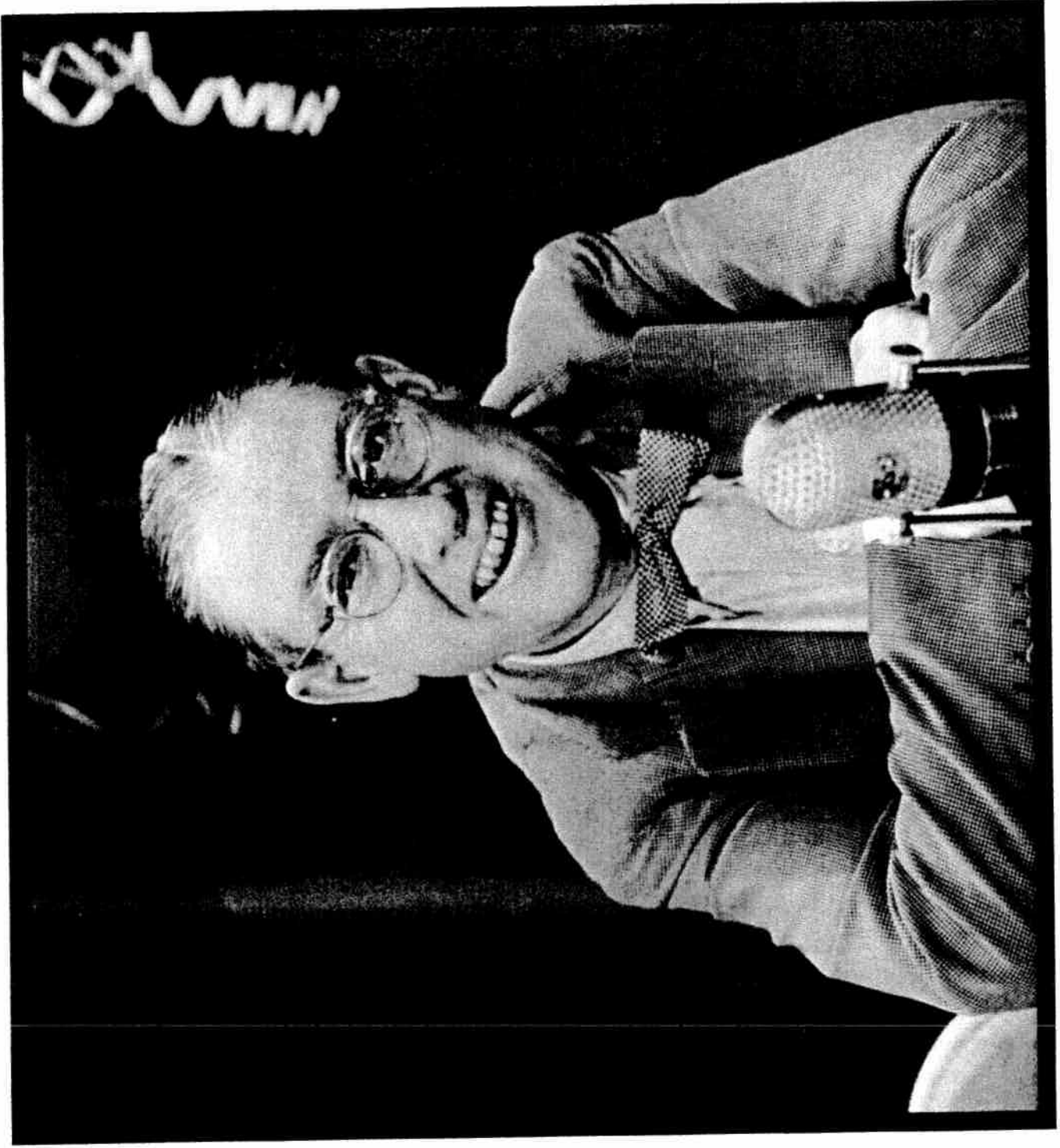
Born and christened Frederick Ogden Nash, the poet was raised in Rye, New York, where his father, Edmund, owned and operated a naval import-export company. The family lived a comfortable life of privilege in a sprawling three-tiered Italianate mansion on fifty acres until Ogden was twelve. Due to

a series of antitrust suits, his father's business failed and the family experienced financial ruin. After several years of struggle, Edmund Nash found new work and Ogden was able to attend St. George's preparatory school, where he contributed to the literary magazine, school newspaper, and yearbook, and went on to Harvard. But only a year into his college education, Ogden's father lost his position and funds ran short again.

At that point (1920) Ogden moved to New York City and started working, first on Wall Street selling bonds and then as a copywriter for streetcar advertisements. In 1925 he and a friend collaborated on a children's book that was published by Doubleday to very little success, but it gave them entry into the publishing world. Once Ogden had the attention of *The New Yorker* magazine his poetry was frequently featured on its pages. In 1931 he published his first book of poetry, *Hard Lines*; it was very well received, and he decided to pursue writing poetry full-time.

I was interested to learn that Nash spent part of the Great Depression in Hollywood as a frustrated screenplay writer (*The Firefly*, *The Feminine Touch*). He also collaborated as a lyricist with Kurt Weill on a popular Broadway musical (*One Touch of Venus*), and was a frequent celebrity panelist for a very successful game show, *Masquerade Party*. Considering his humorist persona, I was shocked to learn that Nash suffered from an incurable and often debilitating condition, Crohn's disease. He spent much of his later life in and out of hospitals and in a state of near constant pain except when the disease was in remission.

Ogden married Frances Leonard in 1931 and together they had two daughters, Lindell (born 1932) and Isabel (born 1933). He was a particularly devoted and enthusiastic father who took immense pleasure in spending time with his daughters. The fierce little poem "Adventures of Isabel" was written for his daughter Isabel and first appeared in *The Bad Parents' Garden of Verse* (1936). Nash wrote many books for children during his life and this work enjoyed equal popularity with his writing for adult readers.



Ogden Nash photograph courtesy of Getty Images.

15. The Walloping Window Blind
Charles Edward Carryl (1841–1920)

AMERICAN

*A capital ship for an ocean trip
Was "The Walloping Window Blind;"
No gale that blew dismayed her crew
Or troubled the captain's mind.
The man at the wheel was taught to feel
Contempt for the wildest blow,
And it often appeared, when the weather had cleared,
That he'd been in his bunk below.*

*The boatswain's mate was very sedate,
Yet fond of amusement, too;
And he played hop-scotch with the starboard watch
While the captain tickled the crew.
And the gunner we had was apparently mad,
For he sat on the cannon's tail,
And fired salutes with the captain's boots,
In the teeth of the booming gale.*

*The captain sat in a commodore's hat,
And dined, in a royal way,
On toasted pigs and pickles and figs
And gummy bread, each day.
But the rest of us ate from an odious plate;
For the food that was given the crew
Was a number of tons of hot-cross buns,
Chopped up with sugar and glue.*

*And we all felt ill as mariners will,
On a diet that's cheap and rude;
And the deck shook when we dipped the cook
In a tub of his gluesome food.
Then nautical pride we laid aside,
And we cast the vessel ashore
On the Gulliby Isles, where the Poohpoo smiles,
And the Anagazanders roar.*

*Composed of sand was that favored land,
And trimmed with cinnamon straws;
And pink and blue was the pleasing hue
Of the Tickletoeteaser's claws.
And we sat on the edge of a sandy ledge
And shot at the whistling bee;
And the Binnacle-bats wore water-proof hats
As they danced in the sounding sea.*

*On rubagub bark, from dawn to dark,
We fed, till we all had grown
Uncommonly shrunk,—when a Chinese junk
Came by from the torriby zone.
She was stubby and square, but we didn't much care,
And we cheerily put to sea;
And we left the crew of the junk to chew
The bark of the rubagub tree.*

16. Topsyturvey-World
William Brighty Rands (1823–1882)

BRITISH

*If the butterfly courted the bee,
And the owl the porcupine;
If churches were built in the sea,
And three times one was nine;
If the pony rode his master,
If the buttercups ate the cows,
If the cat had the dire disaster
To be worried by the mouse;
If mama sold the baby
To a gypsy for half a crown;
If a gentleman was a lady,—
The world would be Upside-Down!
If any or all of these wonders
Should ever come about,
I should not consider them blunders,
For I should be Inside-Out!*

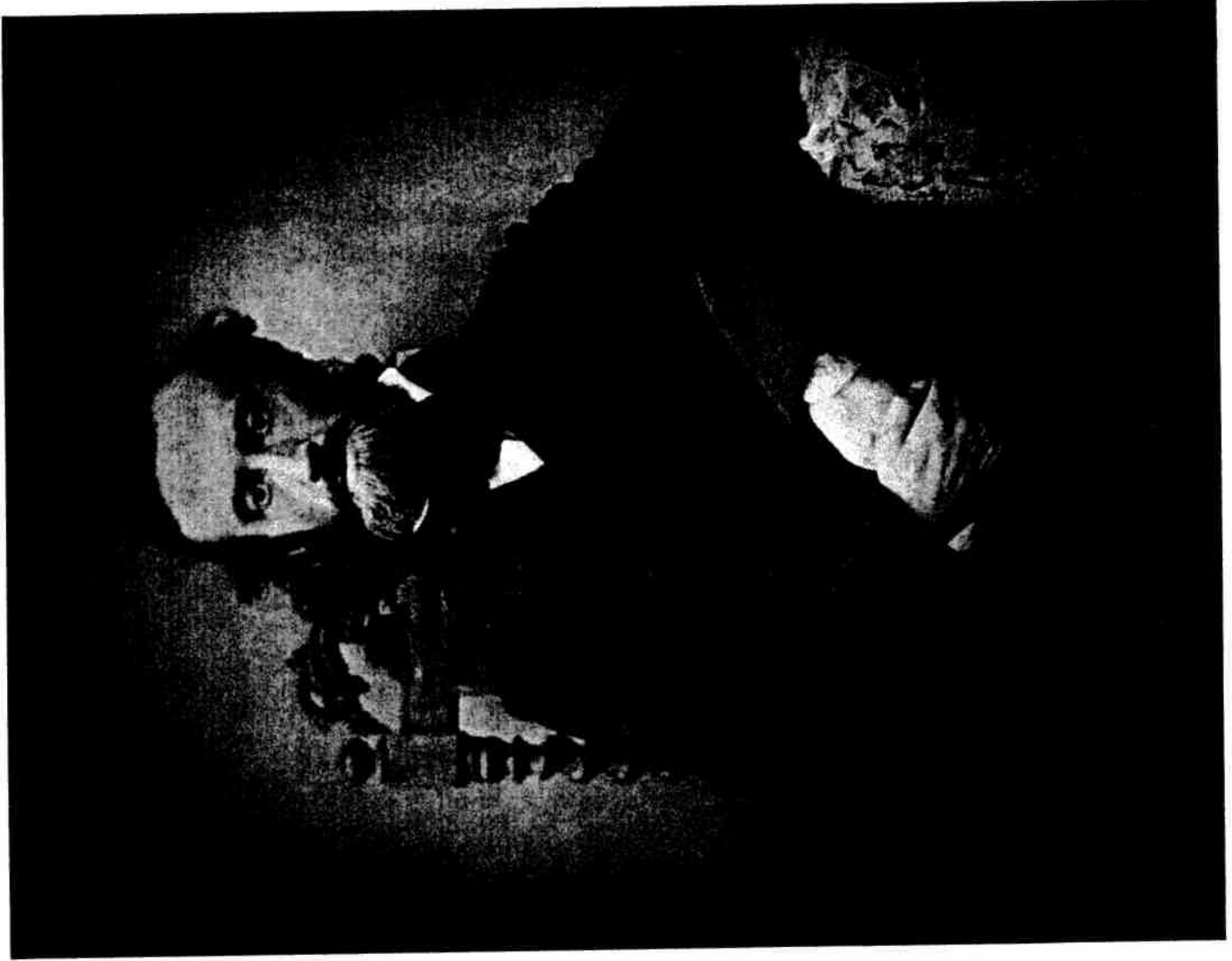
William Brighty Rands was a prolific writer whose children’s verse, stories, essays, and lectures earned him the title “Laureate of the Nursery” in Victorian England though he is very little known today. His legacy is most likely hindered by the fact that he published under some thirty traceable pseudonyms: Matthew Browne, Timon Fieldmouse, and Henry Holbeach, to name a few.

On Christmas Eve, 1823, William Brighty was born in Chelsea, South London, the only child of devout Calvinists Kezia and George Rands. His father was a candlemaker, but despite their poverty William Brighty is said to have learned to read by the age of two. At a young age he also mastered

musical notation and became competent in several foreign languages: French, Spanish, German, Greek, and Latin. Although mostly self-taught, Rands attended public schools intermittently between the ages of ten and thirteen. At the age of thirteen he began working full time in a lawyer's office and continued his studies by using the money he earned to buy books instead of food. He then worked for a brief period in a solicitor's office but could not stomach serving writs to the poor. Eventually he became a foreign correspondent for a merchant's office and began publishing anonymously in newspapers and magazines. He taught himself stenography and in 1857 was invited to be a reporter in the committee rooms of the House of Commons, where he served until resigning due to poor health eighteen years later.

As I investigated the story of Rands's family life, many facts came to light while many more still lurk in shadow. It is certain that Rands married twice, with thirty-five years separating the two ceremonies. The first marriage was in October 1846, to Mary Ditton, the daughter of a cheese monger. Mary and William had three children before Mary died, in 1881. It is recorded that in the same year Rands was married a second time to Hannah Rolls, daughter of a City of London Court Alderman. The curious fact is that prior to their wedding day, Hannah had already given birth to four more of Rands's children. At some unrecorded time Rands apparently left his first home for his second, and although he faithfully supported both families throughout his entire life, it is certain that Hannah Rolls had no knowledge of his first family. Rands himself died one year after his second marriage and he could not prevent the inevitable unraveling of his tightly woven secret life. To their mutual shock, both his families were united at his graveside. Hannah is said to have suffered temporary blindness from the encounter as three complete strangers claimed that they were responsible for their father's internment.

Despite his controversial domestic life, Rands wrote many moral essays for and about children. He believed strongly in their innate goodness. His desire to live in a world where "the children, clever, bold folks, turned the tables on the old folks" is set to rhyme in *Lilliput Levee*, his classic poem and book of the same name, where I found this sweet little bit of anarchy, "Topsyturvey-World."



William Brighty Rands photograph courtesy of David Rands.

17. The Janitor's Boy
Nathalia Crane (1913–1998)
AMERICAN

*Oh I'm in love with the janitor's boy,
And the janitor's boy loves me;
He's going to hunt for a desert isle
In our geography.*

*A desert isle with spicy trees
Somewhere near Sheepshead Bay;
A right nice place, just fit for two
Where we can live away.*

*Oh I'm in love with the janitor's boy,
He's busy as he can be;
And down in the cellar he's making a raft
Out of an old settee.*

*He'll carry me off, I know that he will,
For his hair is exceedingly red;
And the only thing that occurs to me
Is to dutifully shiver in bed.*

*The day that we sail, I shall leave this brief note,
For my parents I hate to annoy:
"I have flown away to an isle in the bay
With the janitor's red-haired boy."*

Nathalia Crane was a child prodigy who published her first book of poetry at the age of eleven in 1924. After submitting a few poems to the *New York Sun* she was invited by the poetry editor to visit the offices of the newspaper. It came as quite a shock when "Miss" Crane appeared at the door to Edmond Leary's office holding her mother's hand. This vivacious little girl quickly became a national celebrity when her subsequent interview with *The Sun* was syndicated to newspapers across the country along with a sampling of her poetry, under headlines like "Our Little Browning of Brooklyn." Her first book of poems, *The Janitor's Boy*, was published by Thomas Seltzer and quickly went through five editions. Seltzer was eventually driven bankrupt by a legal battle over obscenity charges for printing D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* around the same time. Crane suffered controversy of her own over the authenticity of her poems, which seemed far too sophisticated for a child of her age, and despite her prolific output (nine books before the age of sixteen), her status as a prodigy was questioned for years.

Nathalia Crane's star began to fade as she outgrew her youthful celebrity, and aside from finding her listed as a professor of Poetry and World Literature at the University of San Diego, her adult life was a mystery until I found her ninety-three-year-old widower through public records. He was a former ordained Irish Catholic priest and professor of Philosophy at the same university. I learned that she was with Kathie Pitman, who was researching and writing Nathalia's biography. I learned that she was awarded a six-year scholarship to study at a prestigious girls preparatory school and was then admitted to Barnard College as a non-degree special student, where Rudyard Kipling, John Erskine, and Carl Van Doren were among her instructors and advisors. Her first husband was an aeronautical engineer and World War II veteran who died in 1968. There were no children from either of her marriages. In the early 1980s she began to show signs of confusion and disorientation, the early signs of Alzheimer's disease, and in 1983, the same year she received emeritus status, her condition worsened and she left the university. Nathalia Crane, a literary sweetheart to the nation during the Jazz Age, passed away in 1998.



Nathalia Crane photograph from the Smithsonian Institution Archives (Accession 90-105; Science Service Records, Box 4,

Folder: Crane, Nathalia, Image Number: SIA 2008-0687).

25. Spring and Fall: to a young child
Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

BRITISH

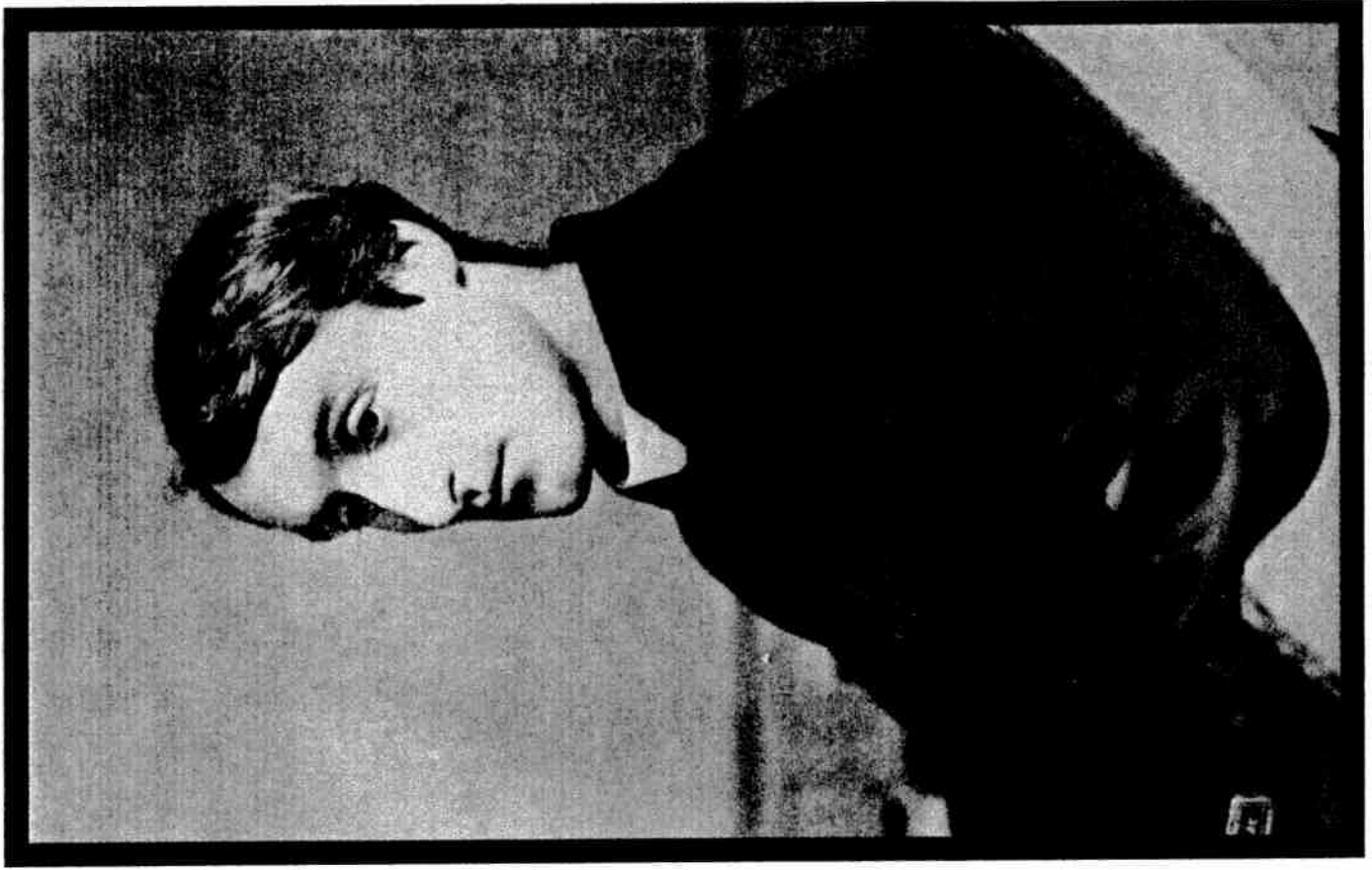
*MARGARÉT, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leáves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Áh! ás the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórrów's springs áre the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in Stratford, England, into a family with a strong commitment to art, language, and religion that heavily influenced his life. His father, Manley Hopkins, was the founder of a marine insurance company but also a poet and author. His mother, Kate Smith Hopkins, shared her husband's passion for music, literature, philosophy, and his devotion to the Anglican Church. Nearly all of the Hopkins children remained connected to the arts and Christian faith in some way throughout their lives. The family moved to Hampstead, outside of London, in 1852, and the children spent their summers in the country, exploring the countryside and studying nature. This early love of nature later influenced much of Hopkins's poetry. After being tutored at home by his mother and aunts until the

age of ten, Gerard was sent to boarding school at Highgate, where he distinguished himself as a brilliant yet stubborn student. “I had no love for my schooldays and wished to banish the remembrance of them, even, I am ashamed to say, to the degree of neglecting some people who had been very kind to me,” he once wrote.

Hopkins went on to Balliol College, Oxford, from Highgate in 1863. He was extremely sociable while at college and it was at Oxford that he met Robert Bridges, a lifelong friend who recognized Hopkins’s luminous talents and championed his poetry during and after his life. He came under the spell of Tractarians, a group of Oxford-based theologians who sought to restore traditional Catholic teachings and ceremony to the Church of England. In July of 1866 he converted to Catholicism and resolved to join a religious order. Hopkins’s conversion devastated his parents, and caused a rift to form. Many of his later poems reveal the depth of the strain between himself and his family. In the spring of 1868, after Hopkins had taken Jesuit vows, he burned the poems of his youth and denied himself the pleasure of writing for many years. He believed at the time that he had to make a choice between poetry and priesthood. Hopkins spent time in and out of several Catholic institutions after joining the Jesuit order, first as a novitiate, then as a student of theology, and finally as a professor.

When Hopkins died of typhoid fever, at the age forty-five, his private papers were meant to be destroyed, according to the tradition of his religious order. Among the few poems that were spared was “Spring and Fall: to a young child.” It concludes with the brief and devastating string of words: “It is the blight man was born for, / It is Margaret you mourn for.” I recently found a sentence in a letter written by Hopkins in 1880 that stopped my heart: “I will enclose a little piece I composed last September in walking from Lydiate. It is to have some plainsong music to it.” The poem he enclosed was “Spring and Fall.” It’s so strange and miraculous that this gentle, shy British Victorian Jesuit could reach out to me from his common grave in Prospect Cemetery, Dublin, a full century after a lifetime of quiet wandering, questioning, melancholia and ecstasy, doubt and certainty, to place this poem in my hands.



Gerard Manley Hopkins photograph by Forshaw and Coles (public domain).