CONTEMPORARY WOMEN POETS OF TEXAS

THESIS

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By

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PREFACE

As a teacher of American literature in high school, I have become conscious of the importance of teaching students of that age level the lore and poetry of their native state. Poems of nature or local color in their own country will hold their interest when material from more distant points seems dull and uninteresting. Through my teaching I have become interested in the poetry of the Southwest and have enjoyed reading the poetry and knowing the poets through personal interview or correspondence.

It is a source of regret to me that, since I have been unable to make an exhaustive study of this subject, several poets who deserve mention have not been included in this thesis. I have selected seven poets from the ranks of the women poets of Texas, studied their volumes of verse carefully, and attempted to analyze them. Brief biographies of the poets have been prepared as a background for their poetry. Of these seven poets, four are native born, of pioneer stock, and their poetry is saturated with the atmosphere of the land of their birth. The three who were not born in Texas came to this state at an early age and call this their home.

One of the difficulties with which I have been confronted has been that of obtaining materials. The
publications of some of the poets were out of print, as in the case of Margaret Bell Houston; after spending much time and effort, I was able to secure only one of her three volumes.

I like to study the works of living musicians and living poets. There is something in the knowledge that they live in this age and understand the problems which confront us all that brings them closer to us and makes them seem more human. It has always seemed regrettable to me that a musician or writer had to be dead fifty to a hundred years before his works were considered of value.

Texans have been embarrassed from time to time by the "wild and woolly," unauthentic tales that have been published by Eastern presses about our state. The contemporary poets of Texas have seriously endeavored to develop an authentic literary culture for the state. It is my purpose in writing this thesis to show that these women poets have assisted in developing this culture and that each has made her contribution toward that development.
CHAPTER I

LEXIE DEAN ROBERTSON

Lexie Dean Robertson, former Poet Laureate of Texas, is a colorful product of the state about which she writes. Mrs. Robertson was born in Lindale, Texas, the home of her grandparents. Her early life, however, was spent in Van Zandt County, where her parents, Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Dean, were teaching. Having grown up in the cultured atmosphere of books and study, Mrs. Robertson does not remember when she started to school. She does remember her father's reading Latin poetry and singing Latin songs to her when she was only three years of age. Another of her memories of this early age is being tied to the benches in school so that she could not run away while her mother was teaching. When Lexie Dean was eight years of age, her family moved to Canton, Texas, where Mr. Dean served as county treasurer. Here she received her elementary and high school education.

After Lexie Dean was graduated from the Canton High School, at the age of fifteen, her family moved to Denton, Texas. Here Lexie Dean was enrolled in the North Texas State Normal because her family had decided that she was too young to go away to college. Lexie was so small in stature that Dr. Bruce, President of the college, measured her by the
buttons on his vest. It was not long until Lexie Dean was known and loved by the students as well as the teachers in the college.

Her college work was interrupted by romance, however, for she married Frank Robertson, a fellow student in the college, when they were both in their junior year. After teaching for one year, the Robertsons returned to Denton, re-entered school, and were graduated the next year.

The Robertsons had taught school in Texas and Oklahoma for several years when oil was discovered in West Texas. This new industry drew Mr. Robertson from the teaching profession into the business world. Mr. Robertson’s old home in Rising Star was the center of the oil excitement. It was there that the Robertsons built "Two Oaks Cottage," where they have lived and entertained friends of all types and interests.

Mrs. Robertson continued her education at Howard Payne College, Brownwood, Texas, and from this college she received her bachelor of arts degree. She has done post-graduate work in Oklahoma University and the University of Chicago. For several years she served as principal of the Rising Star High School. In order to persuade his wife to stop teaching, Mr. Robertson offered to pay her the same salary which she was receiving for her service as principal of high school.

Mrs. Robertson is an enthusiastic leader in civic and cultural projects. At the insistence of Jessie B. Rittenhouse
she was invited to join the Poetry Society of America. She is also affiliated with the Poetry Society of Texas, the Texas Federation of Women Clubs, the Pen Women, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Bookfellows. She has been included in the *Who's Who of North American Poets* and in *Important Women of America*, the latter of which is published in London.

Lexie Dean Robertson, who says that she was born with a sense of rhyme and rhythm, began writing at an early age. She entered her first poem on Texas in a contest in 1922. It was not until 1925, however, that she became seriously interested in the writing of verse. Prior to this time, Mrs. Robertson had been contributing humorous verse to a newspaper column. From this experience she began to write poetry and was almost immediately successful in winning prizes and marketing her output. From the Poetry Society of Texas she captured the major award, The Old South Prize, for her poem "The Wager," and tied for the Alamo Prize. In the nation-wide contest sponsored by Kaleidograph, she won first prize for her poem "The Seeker."

In 1928 *Red Heels*, Mrs. Robertson's first book of verse, was published. The popularity of this book has carried it through ten editions. Her next volume, *I Keep a Rainbow*, now in its third edition, won the Book Publication Award of the Poetry Society of Texas. After the poet received from
the Texas Legislature the appointment of Poet Laureate of Texas, she published her third book of verse, *Acorn on the Roof*.


Following the publication of *Red Heels*, Mrs. Robertson made many public appearances, at which times she read poems from her own book. Her fame as a reader spread until she was asked to fill lecture engagements in all parts of Texas and other states.

In the composition of her poems, Mrs. Robertson has used the major poetic forms. Lyrics predominate in her volumes--love lyrics, nature lyrics, domestic pictures and orthodox religious sentiments. Each of her volumes contains narratives, some in rhymed verse, some in free verse. The oil field pictures for which the poet is perhaps best known are in free verse. "Boomtown Pictures," which is loosely thrown together like the unpainted shacks of the crude oil towns, could easily be called good prose. There are sonnets and sonnet sequences in Mrs. Robertson's collections. In some of these she has used the Shakespearean pattern; in her latest volume, however, she leans to the older Italian form.
The poet's inner sense of rhythm is perhaps the outstanding characteristic of her style. That rhythmic pulsation is felt in her rhymed and in her free verse. Mrs. Robertson has long been a student of human nature, and because of this fact, her poems have a certain directness that is pleasing. There is a strain of humor sometimes found within her lines. In her sonnet "Helen to Menelaus" she says:

My heart is like a harp of many strings
That breathes a silver song to any touch
Of tender hand, but for the master sings
A deeper melody.

(And is that such
A crime as needs forgiving? Can the cup
Refuse the drink to him who pours the wine?)

In the final section of each of her volumes, Mrs. Robertson has proved her mastery of local color and realistic writing. Here the poet has been able to put what she has seen and felt into free verse pictures which are strong in color and are pulsing in activity. There is a certain pathos found here also.

Mrs. Robertson has given a rather unusual definition of poetry. She says that "poetry is the sum total of loving life and understanding it." She believes that any creative impulse honestly and ably expressed is poetry. This may mean

1 Lexie Dean Robertson, Red Heels, p. 62.
the making of a cake or the sewing of a fine seam. "This homey touch, even in her definition of poetry, has caused her to be classed roughly with what critics refer to as the 'Pots and Pans School of Literature.'"\(^3\) The poet does not object to this criticism, for she believes that "pots and pans play a far greater part in the lives of most people than higher esthetics."\(^4\) Mrs. Robertson believes if she can do something to make these people know that there is beauty in their humblest everyday chores, a fact which many overlook, she will have helped them.

It is thought by many readers of Mrs. Robertson's works that her best poems are those dealing with local color. When the oil boom swept West Texas some years ago, this poet was an interested observer of the tense drama. She witnessed cities built over night only to see them disappear almost as quickly when the rush subsided. With the hand of an artist she has painted "Boomtown Pictures," which contains an absorbing story in moving pictures. This poem, which is written in a form Mrs. Robertson calls "Polyphonic Prose, "\(^5\) is divided into three general scenes. The first of these describes the rush as people come in long lines of moving vans, the heavy wheels of which scar the quiet country lanes. In this procession are motor cars, trucks, and loaded wagons drawn

\(^3\)Ibid. \(^4\)Ibid. \(^5\)Reported to the author in an interview with Mrs. Robertson.
by strong dray horses. In a dilapidated ramshackle vehicle is seen an "old crone chewing a snuff brush," the rags and tags of her scant household furnishings trailing half off the broken wagon. The second scene shows the growth of the village. On one day there was no sign of life but a "speckled hen with seven mongrel chickens." Then on the next day there are rows of dirty tents, "while yellow shacks of raw unpainted pine are going up on every vacant lot." Across the road from the village church the owner of the "Wild Cat Inn" is busily engaged in hanging a sign on a rudely constructed building. Men, foreign and prosperous looking, stand in groups with blue prints in their hands. Hundreds of automobiles have moved in. An industrious housewife advertised "rooms for rent," which has inspired the other housewives to do likewise. Under an oak tree where children loved to play, a doughnut industry has sprung into being. The fumes and heat from the gasoline stove which keeps the grease for the doughnuts boiling hot have shriveled the leaves of the giant oak. The third scene describes the Saturday night activities of this newly-made town. A "black-faced clown is selling poison in brightly labelled bottles warranted to cure or money back" to a mob composed of "noisy sweaty coarse humanity, hungry to spend." Painted girls stand on the steps of a newly made dance hall to lure the eager spenders inside. Three giggling girls are afraid but eager to enter. The painted girls help them make up their
minds to go inside. Over the noises of the gambling houses, dance halls, and newspaper boys is heard the sound of "hammers building a rig in the graveyard." "Boomtown Pictures,"\(^6\) whether prose or verse, is well written and impressive.

Another colorful contribution to this group of local color pictures is the study in free verse entitles "Pioneer: The Vignette of an Oil Field." Here are found five illustrations, splendidly drawn, "in raw color, each detail standing out sharply against the soft bosom of the prairie."\(^7\) The first scene pictures the wagons loaded with great iron pipes driven by men who sit unmoved, staring ahead. All day long these pass in great clouds of dust drawn by horses with "down-hung heads." The second scene paints a vivid picture of the oil derricks at sunset as they stand stark against the skyline. The poet uses an interesting figure of speech effectively when she compares the derricks to "grim sentinels" which stand "black and cruel against the golden splendor of the west." The third scene gives an excellent description of the gambling hall,

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brilliant with mirrored lights.
The plank floors creak beneath the muddy-booted feet,
An officer of the law leans against the door
And hears the click of dice, the whir of the wheel,
Unheeding.\(^8\)
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The drug store where raw gin is handed boldly across the counter attracts as many of those who are eager to spend as do the dance halls from whose windows syncopated jazz blares forth. The fourth scene pictures a throng of people waiting silently between the neglected rows of cotton, listening for any sound which might indicate that the well is about to be brought in. Finally the poet adds:

Something released from its dark prison
Is making its way skyward.
Gathering force it deepens into a grumbling roar,
Suddenly straight to the white moon
Shoots a mighty column of flowing gold.

It is all over in a moment.
The derrick stands blackly dripping,
The people laugh and clap each other on the shoulder,
Thinking only of dollars.

The final part depicts a scene in which, although it is Sunday, the people are toiling and paying no heed to the sabbath. The wagons hauling huge loads of pipe lumber down the streets. From the Hotel Gladys painted girls dash out--
Returning later, some are not alone.
There is no Sabbath quiet in all the town
Excepting only in the weedgrown graveyard
Where the dead lie waiting.

The poet closes her picture with a wish to be in a town of little homes, with church bells quietly ringing.

The exhaust pipes sang a pagan chant to the poet in "Ceremonial." Here Mrs. Robertson compares the smoke from the exhaust pipes to "curling wreaths of incense rising to

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9Ibid., p. 102.
10Ibid., p. 102.
some bloated god." The poet continues:

And as the rite goes on  
They bellow deep in earth  
Their pagan chant:

To work! to work! to work! to work!  
Money to make! Money to make!  
Putputput! Putputput!11

In this little poem the author shows a deft and careful handling of a scene well known to those who have frequented West Texas oil towns. The poet further emphasizes the realistic setting with her use of alliteration and sound effects.

Again the poet displays unusual skill and knowledge of true regional color in her development of "The Drawing." Mrs. Robertson's keen appreciation for this scene, typical in most West Texas towns, may have resulted from the fact that she assisted her husband when he, as secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, conducted many of these Saturday and before Christmas drawings. This study in free verse is filled with realistic scenes which are interesting and familiar to most citizens of the Southwest. In this poem, the author describes the families as they leave home early in the morning on the day of the drawing. The roads, rough from late rains which were followed by a bitter freeze, are unnoticed by the eager travelers as they go forth in their wagons drawn by mules. On the way to town the family plans how the mother and boys will drive home in the "new flivver,"

11Ibid., p. 103.
the prize to be given away at the drawing, while dad brings the mules and wagon safely home. Though it is Christmas Eve, the gin is still running in order to care for some late cotton which has been saved by the farmers to be sold when "the price is right." By noon the town is full of wagons and cars of all descriptions, which range from

Cheap rusty touring cars
Spilling over with children eager to see Santa Claus,\(^\text{12}\) to new sedans. In this poem, Mrs. Robertson so cleverly and humorously describes the people that the poem becomes a study in human nature, also. In the midst of all the confusion, small boys set off giant firecrackers which make silly girls shriek. Finally when the merchants feel that the buying is over, the "tired secretary" gathers the last tickets while the crowd begins to surge into the street where the drawing is to be held. A little girl is selected to draw the ticket and is lifted across the shoulders of the people. Just as the giant wheel, containing the tickets, is set in motion, some one rushes to the truck with belated tickets. After these tickets are added the people hold their breath. When the number is called, there is a moment of silence, broken very quickly by the eager shuffling of tickets. A sun burnt farmer, trembling in his excitement, has the lucky ticket. He grins as the crowd cheers. Then

\(^{12}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 105.}\)
Suddenly the air is filled with thousands
Of yellow tickets--
Last hopes tossed toward a primrose sky.
The drawing is over.\textsuperscript{13}

In her poems on human nature, Mrs. Robertson shows that
she has observed life keenly and understandingly. She has
that insight into human nature which might be termed the
heritage of one whose privilege it is to have spent her life
in a small town. From this small world the poet's experi-
ences have given her these words which she has called
"Gossip":

Before I knew how cruel
Just common talk can be
I thought that words were singing things
With colors like the sea.

But since I've felt their caustic lash
And know how they can sting
I hold my breath when words go by
For fear they will not sing.\textsuperscript{14}

The poet employs a regular rhyming scheme in offering
the whimsical poem "My Neighbor Buys White Hyacinths" to her
readers. In this poem she skillfully deals with the tendency
on the part of human beings to be attracted by their oppo-
sites. Here is seen the power of the somewhat irresponsible,
giddy girl, to capture and hold the devotion of a steady,
dependable man. The neighbor is described in the poem as
one who leaves her beds unmade while she reads in the shade
on the lawn, with no thought of preparing dinner for her
husband. When the poet "went to borrow tea," she found her

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 108.\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 35.
neighbor's kitchen gaily painted with bright parrots on the tray and "blue asters in a jar." Rag rugs were on the floor of the kitchen and a mirror was hung above the sink. After having "lolled all day" this neighbor skipped to a tune as she prepared her husband's meal. This she served on a green table beneath a tree. The neighbor's husband, "a steady man," was charmed with his dinner, which consisted of a skimpy sandwich cut in two, with buttered radishes, cheese, nuts, and dates. The poet cries:

They have been married fourteen years
Yet when I see them kiss,
My foolish eyes know hot salt tears
Because of life I miss.15

"Moon Dance" is a light, gay, happy picture of life. The theme is not new, but rather that of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Realizing the brevity of life, the poet dances and is gay, for the moon and she are very wise.

In the poem "Roof Bound," the poet again shows her knowledge of human nature and its restlessness. While busily engaged in sewing, the heart of the young girl has fled from her tasks out "where the high road calls." Though the stitches are deftly neat, her heart and thoughts are distant with the strolling lad.

"Linna," a poem in free verse, with Linna's funeral as its theme, is further proof of Mrs. Robertson's depth of

15Ibid., p. 47.
understanding. Linna was known to members of her church as one who was always present when there was work to be done. She would "stand and wash thick plates and cups and saucers" for three long hours in the summer time without stopping. It was this same Linna whose "pagan feet had danced at dawn down in the willow thicket by the brook." It was this same Linna who knew the secret of the "prairie winds and held a close communion with the singing stars." One day when the poet called, she found Linna dressed in "black georgette pajamas with crimson high-heeled slippers;" and Linna, laughing through the smoke from her cigarette, said the poet "caught her in a mood of scarlet sin." Another time the poet found Linna angry because an "evangelist had preached a hellfire sermon that condemned babies and heathen to everlasting torment." Linna cried,

I believe . . . . . . . .
That God will save a good Mohammedan
Or any one whose life accords with his own creed
Of what is right and wrong.
I believe in Christ, but I believe, too, in Buddha,
And in all saints whose people have been led to believe in them
And do their works.
Why could they, too, have not been sent
By God to be His Sons according to the need of time and place?

The minister who conducted Linna's funeral service spoke of her good works and her willingness to serve in the Master's cause. He continued:
Here lies a good woman
Whose soul has gone to live in heaven:

And I who knew her secret depths,
Her oneness with the earth,
Her eager heart that had gone reaching out for beauty,
The silver shining of her clear-cut mind,
Her bright young spirit that translated all of God
In terms of loving,
I echoed back
A fervent, hushed
Amen.16

"The Wager," for which Mrs. Robertson received the Texan prize, in a contest conducted by The Poetry Society of Texas, is perhaps her best poem of this group. Joseph Auslander, outstanding American poet and judge in the contest in which "The Wager" received the award, has this to say in writing about the poem. "It has so much integrity, such hotly authentic music in its bowels, such value as a lyrical document and local record that form (free verse) flows through and under the story, sustaining it perfectly."17 The poet has used dialect rather effectively in the narrative, which deals with the life and standards of a young minister whom she calls Slim. Slim, who had earned his way through school picking cotton, could pick eight hundred pounds each day. When Samson Johns, who had "drifted in from somewhere for the picking season," heard of Slim's record, he offered to bet Slim five hundred dollars that he, Slim, could not equal this record. The poem vividly and realistically deals with the contest as the eager onlookers watch Slim defend the

16 Ibid., p. 87.
17 Reported to the author in a personal interview with Mrs. Robertson.
honor of his name; he would not accept the five hundred dollars, though he did win the contest. The poet holds her readers' interest throughout the poem, which she brings to a satisfactory conclusion. The scene in the cotton field could not have been told so vividly had the narrator not known and understood the Texas cotton farmer.

Mrs. Robertson's bubbling spontaneity is noted in her poems on the theme of love. In this group are found not a few heart aches, a great deal of happiness, and a certain deft moulding of the eternal human problems. "A Chant of My Beloved," a little poem in free verse, shows thought and planning. The comparisons throughout are interesting and original. However, the poem could as easily be classed as prose. In the first stanza, the poet states that her beloved is an altar where incense of a woman's dreams is lit. In the second stanza the profile of her beloved "is an effegy upon a Grecian Vase." After describing his grace, his voice, his kiss, his eyes and his arms, she merely adds that

The love of my beloved
Is all a woman asks
Of earth or heaven. 18

"Illuminants" is a clever little love poem which the poet wrote for her husband, whose hair is red. She says that she loves bright things like candlelights, scarlet tulips, gypsy campfires, ship's lanterns far at sea, but she says,

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18 Robertson, Red Heels, p. 48.
if all these were offered me,
I know I'd choose instead--
To light my heart through darksome days--
A single shining head.19

"I Sent My True Love" and "I Gave My Love" express a mood of restlessness, a craving for dreams and love unfulfilled. This theme is again found in "If a Gypsy Lad Should Call." This poem is well written, with a regular rhyming scheme, and consists of four stanzas of eight verses each. The poet shows her readers a winsome or wayward mood, which she handles cleverly. The poet has painted a very vivid picture of heart hunger and loneliness in her poems "Absent" and "Where It Listeth." In the sonnet "For Eve" the poet wonders how Eve could have believed in love and lovers, since she had not known of older lovers. She had "not wept with Dido left alone by blue Aegean waters," nor had she

felt the blaze
Of Juliet's sweet passion. Much she missed
Who kept with Adam that first lover's tryst.20

"The Penitent" is the story of a wayward girl who stole out in the night to seek a "dark lad who left when a faint horn blew." But with bruised heart she turned homeward, where she found her old love asleep, unaware that she was gone.

The thoughtful reader grows somewhat weary in reading Mrs. Robertson's love poems; the general theme is so often repeated--a certain restlessness or frustration. There is

19Ibid., p. 31.
20Ibid., p. 61.
a freshness and buoyancy in her poems, however, which are pleasing.

Mrs. Robertson has written a number of poems on the home which are refreshing. "Gypsy Heart" shows something of the restlessness which was found in the love poems, for the poet says that she longs to be as free as a gypsy, with "brown feet bare," but knowledge that the "house needs tending," that "beds need making," that "fires must be kept and porches swept," stills her wayward heart. While she cooks and serves her meals, her neighbors wonder why she wears "gay slippers with red heels." In this little poem, which furnishes the key note of Lexie Dean Robertson's life and personality, is seen her happy disposition. Once while talking to an English professor at Baylor University, the poet complained that she didn't write many poems as good poets are supposed to do. To this the professor replied, "The trouble with you is that you are too confounded happy."21

This same happy spirit and love for the things of home is found in "Heart's Desire," which pictures a neat kitchen with white curtains and gay tulips on the sill. The poet writes:

There I shall pare red apples
And sprinkle on each slice
A snowy drift of sugar
And a little whiff of spice.
I'll dot the top with butter

21 Reported to the author in a personal interview with Mrs. Robertson.
Dewy yellow from cool crocks,
And the fragrant smell of baking
Will outscent the four-o-clocks.

Again in "Housewife" the poet sings of the contentment and "certain quiet joy that comes with tasks well done" in the simple cottage. She sees joy in blue china, in fresh-baked pies, in the kitchen floor scrubbed and clean, in the polished windows. At eventide when she sums up her blessings she finds that "God has come" to the simple home. "Adventurer" contains a similar theme of home. Here is found the picture of a woman who is busily engaged in the household tasks of making beds and sweeping floors, when an airplane, driven by one whom she recognizes to be a woman, passes overhead. Then follows the conflict—a restlessness or desire for adventure, to do those things for which most women are not fitted. The poem closes with the realization that there is deeper joy and triumph to be found in safely piloting the little cottage home.

"I Have Heard Whippoorwills," the poet's own favorite poem, was written after Mrs. Robertson had spent two weeks visiting with poets living in Dallas, Texas. This poem was the first of Mrs. Robertson's compositions to be extensively recognized. This recognition came after the poem received the Old South prize of fifty dollars, the major award of the Poetry Society of Texas in 1927. During the poet's visit in

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Robertson, Red Heels, p. 41.
Dallas, her association with those who were also gifted in poetic art so inspired her that, according to her poem, she did not want to give this experience "back in haste." After this wonderful visit "in the clouds," it was necessary to come "down to earth" and again find contentment in her little house. Nevertheless the poet cries out from the depth of her heart:

Yet though my ways seem just the same, 23
My heart has known the heat of flame.

In each of her volumes, Red Heels, I Keep A Rainbow, and Acorn on the Roof, the poet has a group of religious poems. In "New Churches" the poet expresses the belief that God loves to have new churches built to Him, and that He smiles as He watches each stone laid. Then at last when the church stands furnished and alone, "God kneels and holds the first communion there." 24

"Declaration" contains a deeper note of religious emotion and impresses the reader with the sincerity and depth of the poet. Beginning as a prayer, the poet then expresses a wish that she might have walked with God in Galilee. There would have been no tired nerves if His patient eyes could have bidden her heart to be wise. She further states:

When at some misty dawn
That found you spent
With weary hours of praying
I could have lent
My cottage hearth to warm you

23 Ibid., p. 24. 24 Ibid., p. 75.
And have spread for you my table
With its honey comb and bread,
It would have been my joy to serve you, Lord.

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
To memory of a star and one dark hill
I cleave,
And oh, dear Lord, I must---
Believe! 25

In "This Loveliness I Know" the poet has used beautiful
words to express a very lovely thought. Mrs. Edwin Markham,
in writing of this poem, described it as containing "perfect
poetic expression." 26 The thought is contained in the first
lines:

And I who thought the world was done
Have found creation just begun. 27

On a visit to Monterey, the poet noticed a peon as he
knelt in prayer in an old cathedral. This experience was
the inspiration for the poem "Cathedral Incident." The poet
writes:

In the beautiful cathedral
At ancient Monterey,
I once paused to view some carvings
Near a man who came to pray.
A gaunt and swarthy peon
Knelt at the altar place
While drops of deepest agony
Streamed down his anxious face.

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
Another race and creed was mine
But while I lingered there,
I found my own heart praying too
That God would grant his prayer. 28

25 Ibid., p. 77.
26 Reported to the author in an interview with Mrs. Robertson.
27 Robertson, Red Heels, p. 90.
28 Robertson, Acorn on the Roof, p. 70.
The study of Mrs. Robertson's three volumes of poems has revealed her ability to use both rhymed and free verse. Lyrics on themes of love, domestic pictures, and orthodox religious sentiment predominate in her volumes. There is a similarity of tone and theme between the verse of Mrs. Robertson and Margaret Bell Houston in their poems depicting the gypsy mood. One notes the same restlessness, frustration, blighted hopes. This theme is too often repeated in Mrs. Robertson's volumes. This poet's readers like her best in her local color and human nature studies. Here she deals with facts with which she is familiar. Her "Boomtown Pictures" and "Pioneer: The Vignette of an Oil Field" are interesting reading. However, there is a repetition of this type of verse in each of her volumes, which is tiresome to the reader. Her first poems of this nature are her best. Red Heels contains Mrs. Robertson's best works, though there are some poems in the other two volumes worthy of mention.

Mrs. Robertson does not claim to be a literary poet. Her poems come from a heart that sings and abounds in the joys of living. Anthologies and text books, however, contain some of her poems depicting typical Texas scenes. Students read them and find them fascinating. This poet has summed up her own ability in the following short poem, which she calls "Reward":

If I could write in vivid, glowing words
What Millet put on canvas with his brush
The world would wait with lifted breath to hear
In one great hush.
If I could carve in chiseled flowing lines
A Venus or a Hermes in curved rhyme,
My name along with theirs would live
Enshrined as long as time.

But I can only write such simple lays
As mothers croon to little ones at dusk,
And yet I feel that life gives back to me
More grain than husk.29

29 Robertson, I Keep A Rainbow, p. 61.
Another interesting figure in Texas literary development is Margaret Bell Houston, granddaughter of General Sam Houston, the famous first president of Texas. Although Miss Houston spends much of her time in New York City and Los Angeles, California, she proudly claims Texas as her home.

Miss Houston is the daughter of Doctor Sam Houston, eldest son of the illustrious Texan. Her mother, Lucy Anderson of Kentucky, was known as a brilliant mathematician. Margaret's maternal parent desired that her daughter should be educated in higher mathematics, while the paternal parent decreed that his daughter should be a musician. Both parents had been writers; consequently, it was not surprising that the daughter also should have turned her efforts to that field.¹

Miss Houston tells an interesting incident which occurred one month after her birth at Cedar Bayou, Texas, to which place her parents had gone on a visit. According to the story, Margaret had been carefully wrapped and placed in a little bed in the rear of an old buckboard. When the

¹Joe Lockridge, "Margaret Bell Houston," Dallas News, September 21, 1924, section 3, p. 3.
father and mother were about three miles out of town "a farmer and his team came lumbering up from behind. "Did you all lose something?' he called and presented me to them, still wrapped up and a little dusty. 'I found it in the road about a mile back,' he explained. I hadn't even waked up." Miss Houston has frequently wondered what might have happened to her life if the farmer had liked her enough to have kept her. She thinks that perhaps her life would not have been "quite so chequered, so nomadic."2

Miss Houston's early life was spent in Dallas. Her mother was her first teacher. At the age of eight she wrote her first poem, which she called "Ode to a Daisy." This poem --

Little Daisy
You're so lazy
Blooming but an hour!
When the sun shines warm and bright,
Then you shut your eyes up tight--
Naughty little flower--

caused her father to exclaim to his wife, "The curse is on her!"3

Following the death of her parents, Miss Houston was placed in St. Mary's College, Dallas, from which institution she was graduated. While a student in St. Mary's Miss Houston studied to be an artist; for five years she worked

2 Ibid.
3 "Margaret Bell Houston," Ladies' Home Journal, XLIII (July, 1926), 30.
with charcoal and oils. Tiring of this, she decided that the stage held the answer to her youthful ambitions. She found herself studying at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York. The poet describes herself as a "rudderless ship, blown by every wind of chance."\(^4\)

A youthful marriage, however, and residence in a prairie town, brought this little lady face to face with realities for the first time. She came down to earth, bought herself a typewriter, and began to write. For two years, she sold everything she wrote and there was demand for more. A period followed in which nothing was accepted. Over and over she said to herself, "Never let success go to your head, nor failure go to your heart."\(^5\) Because of this experience Miss Houston urges beginning writers not to be discouraged when this period of reversal comes. For, she says, "the first writing is a mere skimming of cream from the youthful mind. Wait and work or even just wait. The cream will rise again. It did with me."\(^6\)

Because of this determination of purpose, Miss Houston has come to be recognized as a versatile author of novels, serials, short stories, and poems. She writes with equal skill of the Creoles and "Cajuns," of real Southern Negroes,

\(^4\) Ibid.  
\(^5\) Ibid.  
\(^6\) Ibid.
of hardy mountain folk, or of modern young love's problems
in Southern towns and cities. Miss Houston "possesses a
quiet veracity of atmosphere saturated in the environment
she depicts. This appears to be true no matter where her
stories are laid."\(^7\)

Miss Houston's poems have been published in many of the
leading magazines, including \textit{The Century, Poetry, A Magazine
of Verse, Harper's, Good Housekeeping}, and the \textit{Poetry World}.
She is a member of \textit{The Poetry Society of America}, \textit{The Poetry
Society of Texas}, and of the advisory board of \textit{Kaleidograh}.

Besides three books of verse, \textit{Prairie Flower, The Singing Heart}
and \textit{Lanterns in the Dusk}, Miss Houston has
published a number of novels, among which are, \textit{The Little Straw Wife, The Witch Man, Moor of Delight, Hurdy-Gurdy,
Magic Valley, Gypsy Weather, Window in Heaven}, and \textit{Pilgrim in Manhattan}. Miss Houston prefers writing poetry, but she
says that poetry doesn't pay, and she earns her living with
her pen. One day when the poet was talking with Mr. Biglow,
editor of \textit{Good Housekeeping Magazine}, he asked, "What is it
in the air of your state that makes all the natives write
poetry?" Miss Houston told him she thought that it was
because of the romantic history of Texas. Mr. Biglow added
that the poetry the Texans sent him was good poetry, too.\(^8\)

\(^7\) \textit{Holland's Magazine, XLVI} (May, 1927), p. 35.
\(^8\) \textit{Correspondence with Miss Houston, August, 1941}.
Miss Houston writes that her chief interests at this time are her work, her daughter, and her daughter's work. The daughter, an artist, very likely inherited her mother's love of art. Miss Houston hopes that one day she may "get through following this work around the globe, and build a home in Texas, and settle down."^9

The Singing Heart, which won the second annual book publication award offered by the Poetry Society of Texas, is the only one of Miss Houston's books of verse now in print. "On the basis of the quality of this book, Miss Houston takes her place easily beside Karle Wilson Baker, Hilton Ross Greer, and Grace Noll Crowell as one of the four or five genuine lyricists of the state."^10

Although both free verse and rhymed verse are found in The Singing Heart, rhymed verse predominates. There are a few sonnets, such as "The Vagrant;" there are several narratives, among them "The Poet in the Market Place," "Mountains" and "Barbara" are interesting monologues, but the poet is at greatest ease and sings most naturally in her lyrics, the form which she favors in her volume.

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of Miss Houston's style is the vividness with which she has portrayed her own personality. Her love of life, her whimsicality,

^9Ibid.

^10George Bond, "Margaret Bell Houston," Dallas News, October 24, 1926, section 3, p. 3.
and her charm are indelibly imprinted in each of her poems. Life, for her, is a constant adventure. When the cold March rains cause many to pile their fires high with wood, and chide, she says,

I fling my window wide
And scatter to the beggar rain my pence
Of love and reverence,
Crying, "Good luck! and God bless all your woes,"
Dear Mother of the Rose!11

The majority of her poems might be classed as romantic; there is definitely a romantic trend in her own character as well as in her works. Her poem, "When I Am Old," admirably illustrates this strain of romanticism.

This poet is not always gay and happy, for there is often a note of melancholy in her lines. In "The Vargant," where the poet tells of a love which she scorned in her youth, and which she appreciated too late, she cries:

Then I who scorned him knelt to set him free,
And wrapped him on my heart that now is torn
With Love's profound and mastering agony.12

Another characteristic of her style is the expressive language which she uses. She speaks of love as that "pure, perfect coin of Heaven" which "God did but lend for my bestowal." Again in "Rose Ma Belle" she writes "A spatter of rain puts out the star," a refreshing hyperbole. In "My Neighbor's Tree" the lovely sycamore tree "knows herself a

11 Margaret Bell Houston, The Singing Heart, p. 6. All references to Miss Houston's poems in this study are made to this volume.
12 Ibid., p. 10.
a queen." These words are found in "February":

'Tis February, where the Brazos flows,
And the blue sky laughs sunshine down on the snows
The soft, warm snows, mere feathers from the wing,
Of winter flying northward.13

The poems in which Miss Houston shows her gifts to best advantage are those poems which express the gypsy moods, or the nomadic spirit. The poet has called herself a nomad, and it is perhaps a reflection of the poet herself that charms her readers. The "Wanderer," which is quoted below, possesses that whimsicality which characterizes this group of poems:

Every little house I see,
Underneath its vine and tree
Wakes a wistfulness in me.

Every garden that I meet,
Every hedge-row, pruned and sweet,
Stops the passing of my feet.

When the road is dark with rain
Every lighted window pane
Beckons me to rest again;

Yet I know if I should stay
Every little road would say,
"Come away. Come away!"14

With a somewhat easy, flippant manner she writes, in "The Bargain," about a "merry devil" to whom she traded her heart. After the trade, she writes:

And I went dancing down the sands
And all along the sea,
For it was wonderful to feel
So heartless and so free.

13 Ibid., p. 5.
14 Ibid., p. 28.
I danced all day, I danced all night,  
I never cared to rest,  
For all that makes one weary  
Is the heart within his breast.15

On a quiet evening, she came upon her "devil," who had been waiting in order to give her heart back to her. As her conscience was awakened, she heard her devil say:

"It is so faithful that it sticks,  
So soft it makes me pray,  
I've come to give it back to you."  
He jumped -- and ran away.  

And suddenly my feet were still,  
My tears were wet as rain,  
And underneath my breast I felt  
A silly little pain.16

"The Stroll" has for its theme a similar idea-- a very wrinkled-cheeked old lady has told the young lady in the poem that when she is old, the men will not bother her as she strolls through life's highways. But the young lady cried, "How could she think that that would comfort me?"

In "Magic Wisdom" the poet is telling her loved one that she can love until the wanderlust possesses her:

For I can dance as bubbles dance,  
And beckon like a star,  
But on my madcap slipper-soles  
The highway bruises are.  

For pleading is a mockery  
And fetters are but play,  
And is a thing our own, my dear,  
If it would fly away?17

The best of this group of poems and the one for which

15 Ibid., p. 42.  
16 Ibid., p. 43.  
17 Ibid., p. 27.
the poet is best known, is "Song From the Traffic." In 1925 this poem won the Texan Prize of the Poetry Society of Texas. The poem was written in New York in the spring of the year, and gives vivid pictures of conflicting emotions within the poet. While she sees New York in its greatness and magnitude, her heart longs for her native land,-- her Texas. The poem follows:

The black haw is in flower again,
The red bud's rosy tide
Splashes the wood and stains the shade
Where dog-tooth violets hide.

(Manhattan--Manhattan--I walk your streets today,
But I see the Texas prairies bloom a thousand miles away!)

Primroses burn their yellow fires
Where grass and roadway meet.
Feathered and tasseled like a queen,
Is every old mesquite.

(It's raining in the barren parks, but on the prairie-side
The road is shining in the sun for him who cares to ride!)

The plum trees' arms are burdened white
And where the shrubs are few
Blue bonnets fold the windy ways--
Is any blue so blue?

(Clouds of them, crowds of them, shining through the grey
Blue bonnets blossoming a thousand miles away!)

How could I live my life so far
From where March plains are green,
But that my gallivanting heart
Knows all the roads between?

(Manhattan--Manhattan--When you jostled me today,
You jostled one a-galloping a thousand miles away.)

Next in importance to her nomadic poems are her poems on
the theme of love. "Quest," though faulty in rhythm,
expresses loneliness for some one whom the poet has held very dear. Although this person has died, the poet says she searches every throng of people for a glimpse of the face:

   And so I shall go hoping without rest,
   Seeking and hoping down the roads of space,
   Until I turn the corner of some star,
   And meet you, face to face. 19

"When I Am Old" shows a romantic strain in Miss Houston's nature, as well as an appreciation for the beautiful. The poet, using delicate, well-chosen words, has wrought a bit of imagery as she pictures herself as very beautiful when she is old. Evidently someone whom she loves has hurt her, and the poet feels that the suffering will have passed when she is old. The thought contained in "Home-Coming" reminds the reader of the theme of Shakespeare's sonnet "When in Disgrace with Fortune and Men's Eyes." The poet, "tired with hope and new despair," is revived by the coming of one whom she loves.

In "The Mime" the poet is saying goodbye to a loved one, whom she has mirrored through the years. She says that even though she has sung the same song without a note amiss, yet underneath "I have known too the pain within the heart."

"Plea" is a delicate little love poem in which the poet is writing to some one whose love has mended her broken life. She pleads with this loved one:

19 Ibid., p. 12.
Oh, carry it still
Gently, skilfully,
If it fell from your hand
Even you could not mend it.

Written in free verse, and very daintily, "My Garden" leaves its readers desirous of a stroll within this "little walled-in garden" where the poet has stored her memories, faiths, and dreams. In the following lines she offers to bring her friend a few of her flowers,

But I will not take you there to walk among them,
Nor tell you the way--
Not even you,

for some of her flowers are too fragile, too precious. They "would vanish at the brushing of a hand." "Absence" is a sentimental poem in which the poet is talking to some one whom she has left behind. Yet she says, "Overhead the un-failing sunrise smiles alike on you and me." The lines which follow indicate that the loved one may be in Texas while the poet is in California:

Reach out your hands. Far off, reach out your hands!
Toward sea and prairies I am reaching mine.
For I have climbed the tallest peak that stands,
unto its utmost pine,
Unto its hood of snow that I may be
Nearer the heaven that shelters you and me.

"The Lover Sings" is evidently written to an estranged lover, some one from whom the poet had parted in the winter. However, when April came, everything in nature reminded her of her

\[20\text{Ibid., p. 16.}\]
\[21\text{Ibid., p. 20.}\]
\[22\text{Ibid., p. 21.}\]
love, of whom she sings:

I meet your glance where irises are wet,
Your voice has found the crooning stream and grown
Into its undertone.

I have met
Your white arms reaching from the cherry bough.
The thrushes sing your laughter. I forget?
0 heart of mine, 'twas winter took my vow.
'Tis April now.  

In "Grandma" the poet shows an understanding of the depth of love which an aged grandmother feels for her grandson who is away at war. When the sun shines, the grandmother wonders if this same sun shines on her boy in Picardy. When the cold rain falls, she closes her eyes, for she cannot watch the drops fall upon the quiet ground, fearing that her boy is suffering. She promises that if the Dear Lord will let her boy come back again "all whole and well and strong," she'll do nothing but hold his hand all day long; she adds:

Yet, laddy, when you really came,
I laughed and wiped my eye,
And aired your room, and brushed your coat,
And made an apple pie.  

"The Daughter," a very interesting love poem, describes a home scene in which the father's second marriage of a year previous had lighted his lonely home, added a richer grace to the halls, and placed a crest on the carriage door. But, as the lovely daughter of his first marriage sat at the piano playing old forgotten airs, the father seems lost in memory of that first love. The daughter, wearing her

23 Ibid., p. 39.
24 Ibid., p. 56.
mother's bracelet, has her mother's golden hair, the same curve of wrist, and "the same little dimpling twist whenever a note went flat." The new wife, unheeding, wonders if the styles in cloaks will change greatly with the fall.

"Prudence: 1778" is a narrative, telling the story of a young girl of 1778, who, planning to marry, has written her thoughts in her diary. She plans to show this diary only to the young man she marries. However, a century later, her great-grand nieces and nephews find the diary of Prudence who died in 1778, and are amused at the "queer old spelling."

"Barbara," another love story written in monologue, tells of a young lady who "lived down on the water-edge." Some years before, a tramp freighter from Argentina had come into port there. And Barbara, who "was pretty in those days, with dark, blowing hair, and lashes that turned her hazel eyes to black," "took up with" one of the sailors from the tramp vessel. After two days they were married in her mother's boarding house parlor. The sailor, of course, did not return, and Barbara waited for years by the edge of the water. Finally,

One day they found her,—
Lying in her house
Dead,
Looking a little glad.

I remember
There had been a full moon that night
It hung over the gulf,
Yellow-gold,
Hushing the wind;  
Making the water still.  

Aside from "Song From the Traffic," previously mentioned, Miss Houston's nature poems are not among her best works; in fact, the poems found in this group, with few exceptions, are mediocre. "My Neighbor's Tree," a musical poem of the out-of-doors, has as its theme a sycamore tree that lives next door in her neighbor's yard. The poet's house is covered with a "tasseled canopy of boughs." The poet feels the throb of life within the tree; she feels the breathing as the tree croons and murmurs lullabies. She also feels that the tree is hers, for her neighbor scarcely knows the tree,  

As some men scarcely know their wives,  
Living beside them all their lives.  

"February," a little nature lyric, done in couplets, tells of the warm soft snows in February. Spring follows cautiously with the appearance of the first violet and budding orchard. In describing "March Rain," the poet uses figurative language very aptly. This poem also contains a bit of the poet's philosophy of life. She says the grey March rain shakes her wet locks against the poet's window pane, and "raps with her knuckles" at the poet's eves. The poet throws her windows wide and expresses her gratitude in "love and reverence," for she realizes that without these rains there  

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 76.\]
will be no spring roses. The poet describes the ever-changing cycle of time in "Old Year." Out of the old the new is born; so it is with the new year. The following lines conclude this poem:

Through all the shining air,
A million leaves, a million petals break.
O happy year, that only died to wake,
Singing again, and fair!

"Tulips" is a happy little poem, with a humorous strain throughout. The poet says her heart is drawn to anyone who has red and yellow tulips in her window. She closes by adding,

I would marry any man,
And serve him with a will,
Who, living all alone, should plant Tulips on his sill.

There are a number of poems in Miss Houston's volume which fall under the grouping of miscellaneous. Of this number, there are two poems, "Mountains" and "Trash-man," which are the poet's only efforts at realism. The former, in free verse, is not pleasing in its rhythm. Written as a monologue, it pictures a woman from the prairies of Texas, who, following her husband's death, has gone to live with her daughter and son-in-law in the mountains. The prairie woman, talking in dialect to her daughter's mother-in-law, shows her loneliness, her heart hunger for the prairie with its

26 Ibid., p. 8.  
Miles top o' miles,
So's you can see,
So's you can breathe.

The poem presents a contrast between the mountains and the prairie country. Even though the narrator admits that this new country has many advantages over her frequently drought-stricken prairie land, her longing for her native soil is so great that she cries,

I got to go back
It ain't yo' fault. It just don't do
For prairie folks to try to live in
the mountains.26

The "Trash-Man" is a child's description of the trash-man's shack, surrounded by "bottles and barrels and old tin cans piled on the ground." The poet evidently sacrificed her rhythm in order to have the poem sound as though a child were telling the story. The effect, consequently, is amateurish.

"The Singing Heart," the poem from which the volume took its name, is well done and very pleasing. Here the poet is saying that if the heart sings and is happy, one can gain all the necessary things and more. The poet says that the mother of a babe, ere "he was born, went down to the Magic Mart," where she bought for her child a singing heart.

She gave him the costly Singing Heart.
He took her gift with a smile,
And he won back all she had spent for it
Before he had gone a mile.29

26 Ibid., p. 57.  
29 Ibid., p. 31.
"Rose Ma Belle," a stirring little story of childhood, shows how deeply a child can care for its playthings, and how much it suffers when these toys are neglected or left out in the rain, as was Rose Ma Belle. The experience with Rose Ma Belle left its imprint on the young child, and since she is older she recalls these feelings every time she hears it raining in the night. "Hannah, Mah Honey," another of this miscellaneous group, is done in negro dialect with rhythm that would lend itself to a musical accompaniment. The poet has caught the characteristic negro swing and sentiment in this interesting little poem. There are several word pictures that hold the attention of the reader; for example,

De fireflies twinkle in the skirts ob de night
Like de stars done sprinkle dey li'l drops o' light.30

The poet grows quite serious in "Broken Playthings" and offers her readers the first religious poem of the volume. She tells of a child's crying for his broken toys at eventide. After the child has fallen asleep, the mother mends the broken toys and lays them by his side so he will have them when he wakens in the morning. Then she tells how man bewails his broken treasures, with which he is loath to part. But God,

Unmoved because Thou knowest all,
Dost fold us from the treasures of our heart
And we shall find them at the morningtide
Awaiting us, unbroken, beautified.31

30 Ibid., p. 60. 31 Ibid., p. 64.
Perhaps the poet is writing of herself in "Youth." She has felt that when she reached a certain age which she calls the "crest of the hill," she should lay aside frivolities as she must lay aside youth. She looked "for a sudden change when she came to the crest of the hill." Youth did seem to depart, but Joy would never be still although she said, "Softly Joy! They will laugh at you and me." In conclusion the poet writes:

And Joy laughed long, and she looked--
And youth at her side walked still,
For never will youth depart
If Joy and her song remain.32

This poem shows the same quality of the joy of living that has been paramount in Miss Houston's work. Here also is found the poet's philosophy of life.

The most outstanding poem in this group is "The Poet in the Market Place." Here the poet, through the use of imagery, has painted a very excellent picture of the city's market place, where sellers and buyers meet.

Here are the stalls of sunny fruit,
Crimson, and cool and purple-wined,
And here are piled with mouths too mute,
Bright birds with soft breasts newly stained.

Here is the booth where one beats gold
To twinkling rings or lucent bands,
And here are glistening, fold on fold,
The silken looms of sunrise lands.

Beside the outer wall of the market place, a poet sits alone, with his folded parchments for sale. Within their sacred

32 Ibid., p. 63.
folds are to be found "the wind-cry of a wandering shell," "a fort of moonlight from the South," "a draft of Heaven with dregs of hell," "the nightingale's last note at eve."
The crowds have gone and the poet alone is left. Many have passed his laden stall; many have seen the folded parchments, but none have bought. As the poet waited, the "painted woman" whom he saw at the market place looked upon him. She called him her brother and comforted him with these words:

"Of all the throngs that came to buy
Thank God that no man bought of thee.

"Though Sorrow take her burning toll,
Though Hunger keep thee, hand to hand,
Thou hast not bartered half thy soul
To him who doth not understand."

In the study of Miss Houston's volume of verse, it was found that she used all of the major poetic forms. She has used both rhymed and free verse, but a careful study finds the free verse somewhat experimental. The poet's rhythm is frequently faulty as it is in "The Trash-Man." The poet's vivid personality is so much a part of her poetry that the reader feels her love of life and her charm. This romantic trend in the poet's own character is reflected in her works. Another characteristic of the poet's style is her expressive language, which she uses aptly and well. She also possesses naturalness and ease of expression.

The verse in which Miss Houston shows her gifts to the

best advantage is that depicting her nomadic nature. The poet's next best group of poems is her love poems. Although Miss Houston has written several interesting nature poems, on the whole, her poems in this group are mediocre.

A number of Miss Houston's poems in *The Singing Heart* show thought and make good reading. However, the two poems which stand out, and which constitute the poet's chief claim to fame, are "Song of the Traffic" and "The Poet in the Market Place."
CHAPTER III

BERTA HART NANCE

During the last quarter century persistent effort has been made by scholars and critics to encourage the development of a true western literature. This effort has been brought about by the publications from Eastern presses which found a ready market for their "wild and woolly" tales of Texas. Many of these tales so definitely misrepresented the true West that writers who love their native soil have been making a desperate effort to counteract their influence.

The Poetry Society of Texas and other similar organizations have sponsored contests in which prizes were offered to those who produced poems depicting the authentic West, stripped of exaggerated dialect and falsely conceived tales. Under this stimulus, a number of women poets of Texas have made contributions that are creditable from both a historical and a literary standpoint.

One of the most successful of these poets is Berta Hart Nance of Albany, Texas. Miss Nance, born of true pioneer stock, knows her people and her West. This poet tells her stories simply and directly. In them one finds no trace of the loose or garbled diction found in the "wild and woolly" tales previously depicted.
From Rutherford County, Tennessee, in 1850, Drury Simith Nance, grandfather of Miss Nance, came to settle in the community now known as Eliasville, Texas. From Eliasville, Drury Allen Nance, father of Berta Hart Nance, went as a soldier in the Civil War. Following the war, Drury returned to this locality, in which his daughter, Berta, was born and reared. At that time the town was small, with somewhat less than a thousand inhabitants. There was only one public school which contained six rooms. From this school Miss Nance received her early education.

When she was fifteen years of age, however, the ranchmen built a little junior college called the Reynold's Presbyterian Academy. Good teachers were imported, and it was from this college that Miss Nance was graduated, with two years of college work; later she taught in this school as a substitute Latin teacher. Miss Nance, in speaking of her education, says that she has taken a great many courses by mail since then, all courses in English or concerned with writing. Included in these courses were three years' work in English from the State University in Austin -- all they would let her have without going there. Because of her invalid mother, Miss Nance was unable to leave her home to pursue her studies. Miss Nance has this to say of her writings, "If I can write, I learned most about it from those Austin courses. One of my instructors was J. Frank Dobie, who has never forgotten me, nor neglected an
opportunity to boost my work. He used "Cattle" in his last book, *The Longhorn*.¹

The Nance family loved books and reading. Every time Mr. Nance took cattle to market he returned with more books. When Miss Nance was twelve years of age her father's library contained the complete works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Bulwer-Lytton, and Thackeray, all of Scott's novels, *Les Miserables*, *Corinne*, by Madame De Staël, Poe's poems, an unabridged dictionary, an encyclopedia in fifteen leather-bound volumes, *Don Quixote*, and many other works, all classics or standard books. Miss Nance admits that her father and mother both "scribbled a little." Her father was "steeped in frontier lore and was an incomparable teller of tales." In the proper mood and with the right audience, Miss Nance says that she has never heard her father's equal.

Miss Nance, who is very much a home-town person, took part in all the round of activities which Albany afforded. She was a consistent church worker, having taught a Sunday School class at the Presbyterian Church for fourteen years. During this time she also served as secretary of the Women's Missionary Society. Miss Nance, a business woman, has made a living by managing the family property. Because of the cold winters and northerns, Miss Nance left Albany for a temporary home in Tuscon, Arizona, from which place she continues to manage her business interests in Albany.

¹Correspondence with Miss Nance, August, 1941.
Miss Nance began writing poetry very early in life. At the age of sixteen she won her first prize. Her first published poem appeared in the Albany News, of Albany, Texas. Since that time her poems have won many prizes in contests sponsored by the Poetry Society of Texas. These include the Alamo prize of 1927, a tie for the same prize in 1928, the Texan prize in 1931. In 1929 she won the southern prize of the Chattanooga, Tennessee Writer's Club. In 1932 she won second prize in the Bookfellow's contest for a sonnet on a musical subject. Miss Nance is a charter member of the Poetry Society of Texas, and a member of the order of Bookfellows. She has contributed poems to Poetry World, Verse Craft, Sonnet Sequence, The Step Ladder, Kaleidograph, The Lantern, Better Verse Expression, and other periodicals.¹

Of her own life Miss Nance says that she has learned a good deal that she would like to pass on, but it seems that life can be learned only by experience. Miss Nance has found her greatest pleasures in little things, a fact which she attributes to her dash of French blood. She is very fond of music, of people, of cultivating friendships. She believes that life is good, and even though these are bad days for the world, that according to history, this sort of thing cannot last. Miss Nance believes that life is worth living, that it is worthy of our best efforts and sacrifices.²

²Vaida Stewart Montgomery, A Century with Texas Poets.
³Correspondence with Miss Nance, August, 1941.
Among articles which Miss Nance has published, her essay "A Message to Young Poets" is of especial interest to writers of poetry. In this essay she urges young poets to resolve to keep always a corner in their lives for their gift. She says that as other things crowd in, it is easy for poetry to be neglected. This gift of poetry does not mature at once, but grows with the years. As one grows in wisdom, experience, and knowledge of life, so also will his gift grow. The cultivation and development of a talent makes of life an endless satisfaction and tends to cure one's restless striving and seeking for something unknown. Miss Nance says that the average American citizen has more leisure than has any private citizen since the days of Greece. She feels that from this wonderful opportunity should come a long line of poets, musicians, painters, and sculptors. Miss Nance urges her readers to set a high standard for their work and to see that every printed poem comes up to this standard. She says for young ambitious writers to get away from the idea of making money out of poetry, for the best poetry is not made with that idea paramount. She urges as a step in preparation that one "study the work of great poets. Memorize it. Let it sink deep into your soul. We become like that which we contemplate. You will soon find that you crave the language of intense thought, and familiarity with it makes you powerful."4

Included in Miss Nance's writings are found most of the major poetic forms. Lyrics form a large portion of her writings; however, she has done a number of longer narratives such as "Britt," "Elizabeth of England," and "The Teacup," but these are not so good as some of her shorter lyrics such as "In Praise of the Guadalupe." Her sonnets are well worded and consistently well done. She uses the Italian form in the main, although she occasionally breaks from the old form. Her sonnet sequence, "West Texas Spring," is worthy of praise because of its thought content and structure. Although some free verse is found in her writings, a regular rhymed verse predominates. She has made frequent use of the heroic couplet; her masterpiece, "Cattle," employs this form throughout. Also found in her works are a number of little five-line poems, written in free verse, which she calls Cinquains; these brief poems form apt descriptions or definitions of a wide range of subjects. One of the most apt is "Fame," which follows:

Fame is
A hard, green fig
That hangs upon the tree
For a long time, and ripens in
A night.  

In describing Miss Nance's style as clear-cut and direct, one names its two dominant features. An understanding of her subjects and of the people about whom she writes

5Berta Hart Nance, Flute in the Distance, p. 45.
has given her a certain aptness of expression. In one of her poems she says that she has "loved words as others have loved people." Her diction is chosen to express the thought she tries to convey. In her poem "Texan," she observes that to be a Texan is

To race the norther sweeping south
And toss the dice with floods and drought.  

And again in "Cattle" the poet writes:

Texas is a shaggy hide,
Dripping blood and crumpled hair:
Some fat giant flung it there,
Laid the head where valleys drain,
Stretched its rump along the plain.

Miss Nance's poetry shows care in thought and preparation. She has set for herself a rather high standard and has striven to maintain it. She has also been watchful of the grammatical structure. Imagination is an element in Miss Nance's poetry which her readers enjoy. In this initial poem in her volume of verse the poet says that her "songs are drops of honey from wide and tawny fields." Other interesting metaphors are found in her "Cinquains" in which she gives brief poetic definitions of fame, brief joy and belief. Personification is a figure of speech which the poet often uses. She writes:

6 Kaleidograph, January, 1936.

7 Berta Hart Nance, Flute in the Distance, p. 19. All poems referred to in this chapter are contained in this volume of Miss Nance's, unless otherwise stated.
The old brick house is reticent,
While years go marching through,
It does not prattle of its woes,
As wooden houses do.

Miss Nance's greatest contribution to literature is thought by her readers and critics to be found in her original and vigorous treatment of the Southwest. She is both a romanticist and a realist, for even though she paints a vivid, realistic picture of scenes familiar to most of her readers, she also adds a bit of color and music, which softens and pleases. In "Wild Honey," the introductory poem of her volume Flute in the Distance, Miss Nance compares her songs with drops of honey. In the first stanza she has patiently gathered these drops of honey -- her songs -- from "wide and tawny fields and from meager desert places." In the second stanza she says her songs have in them the "tang of the thorn," the "gold of the dusty blossoms." They have been sweetened with waxen yucca and the spice of the purple plum. The last stanza repeats the thought expressed in the first stanza but adds,

My songs are drops of honey
And colored with the sun,
Wild essence of the desert
A harvest hardly won.

Miss Nance's poems do reflect the thoughts contained in this poem, for they are truly gleaned from the fields, the prairie, and the desert.

8 Ibid., p. 32. 9 Ibid., p. 15.
"Sea-Wind of the Prairie," is an interesting sonnet based on an impression of Texas scenes which the poet knows well. Here she seems to capture in her lines the urgent wind with its piercing cry as it sweeps down upon the prairie slope and moans "along the dim ravine." The "tortured mesquites twist and lean, while like an angry tide, the wind beats on."

"The Road to Texas" is a brief poem in which the poet describes the hardships encountered on the trail to Texas. The story, told simply and forcefully follows:

Beside the road to Texas
My father's mother lies,
With dust upon her bosom,
And dust upon her eyes

O cruel road to Texas,
How many hearts you broke
Before you gave to Texas
The rugged strength of Oak;\(^{10}\)

In the poem "Old Fort Griffin" the poet is standing on the site where at one time wagon trains brought hides of shaggy buffalo, where the Tonkawas, a friendly tribe of Indians, were helping the defenders of Old Fort Griffin find a red Commanche trail. Now, in contrast to those days when Texas history was in the making, "the dove calls where the bugles sang;" where soldiers drilled, the mesquite trees now parade, while the mocking bird acts as sentinel.

"Border Tragedy," a story based on Southwestern lore,

\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 18.
has been told in narrative verse with regular rhyming. The scene is laid in Del Rio by the San Felipe Creek and concerns a Mexican father who had gone to "fetch his daughter home." The daughter, whose work was finished at midnight, waited for her father; the father did not come. At sunrise a search for him began. It was ended when the father's body, riddled with bullets, was found in the water. "Frontier Mystery" is another interesting narrative in which the poet tells of a woman admired by the poet's uncle. This uncle, a ranger in the old Fort Griffin days, knew little of women, and it was not surprising that he admired one described in this way by the poet:

   Her dress was dark and splendid.
   Her hands were fair and long,
   Her eyes were soft and shining
   Her voice was full of song.

A person so lovely would seldom be found in a gambling den where she played poker with all the men. The poet continues:

   No man dared insult her
   And no one knew her name,
   When she had won a fortune
   She vanished like a flame.11

This, according to the poet, was the "only touch of glamour" that the ranger ever knew.

   "Britt" is a well written narrative based on an incident which occurred during the Civil War "while Texas men fought Grant in Southern lanes." This poem tells the story of a

11 Ibid., p. 25.
slave named Britt, whose wife was stolen by the Indians. Although his mistress forced him to wait until the end of the war to search for his wife, his determination never wavered. Finally, by his own cleverness and fearlessness he found her and brought her back to civilization.

The two best poems in this group, the two for which the poet has received recognition and praise, are "Cattle" and "Texan." Of the poem "Cattle," Patrick D. Moreland has this to say: "To me, 'Cattle' is the greatest poem written of Texas. It is great in comprehension of Texas' past and present, written with magnificent restraint and power." Written in heroic couplets, this poem is a vigorous comparison of the early development of Texas with that of other states. Miss Nance begins by saying:

Other states were carved or born,
Texas grew from hide or horn.

Other states are long or wide,
Texas is a shaggy hide.

Other soil is full of stones
Texans plow up cattle-bones.

Reflecting an inspired and artistic handling, this poem is a brief, clear-cut description of the land of which the poet is a part.

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12 Patrick D. Moreland, frontispiece on volume Flute in the Distance, Kaleidograph Press, 1935.
13 Nance, Flute in the Distance, p. 19.
Winner of the Centennial contest, sponsored by Kaleidograph Magazine for poems on Texas themes, Miss Nance's poem "Texan" is of especial interest to natives of that state. "Texan" shows the firm, sure grip of the mature artist. Since this poem is not in her volume of verse, it is quoted in its entirety.

To be a Texan is to ride
With past and future at your side.

To race the northers sweeping south,
And toss the dice with floods and drouth.

To be a Texan is to know
You must keep faith with friend and foe,

That men are brave and women true
Though some may fail among the crew.

That love is not a pretty game,
And God is more than just a name.

To be a Texan is to feel
The Alamo against your heel. 14

Although Texas and the Southwest have been the inspiration for a great deal of Miss Nance's poetry, her volume Flute in the Distance contains a number of poems with other themes. Sea winds, golden sunsets and West Texas spring are all vividly described in Miss Nance's poems on nature. "West Texas Spring," a sonnet sequence containing four carefully written sonnets in Italian form, shows that the poet has learned much from nature. In "Wild Plum Blossoms," the first of this group of sonnets, the poet pictures for her readers

14 Kaleidograph, January, 1936.
a wild plum thicket which "clings with taloned feet and
cowers while the gray northwesterners beat across the valley."
When spring is in the air, the robins trill; orioles sing in
the dark mesquite; the plum blossoms add their fragrant
beauty to the year. Here are found the bees, the sober
moths and the early butterflies "that pause and cling among
the lacy drifts of honey-dew." Last to come is a cardinal,
a singing flower that stops "to preen a rosy satin wing."
"Early April" is further proof of the poet's ability to
picture nature with the mature brush of the artist. The
octave of the sonnet describes the slopes now covered with
the tender green where "yellow larkspur flames along the
fields." As winter "yields its place," the wind no longer
bites the farmer boy who wields, at intervals, an ax. The
sestet tells of the trees that feel in their veins the re-
assurance that spring has come. The elm, the oak, the
walnut, and all the little thickets join the race.

To meet half-way the promises of spring,
The wise mesquite alone has not believed
And stands in wintry blackness, undeceived. 15

"San Angelo Sunsets," the third member of the sonnet se-
quence, is a splendid description of a West Texas sunset.
In this poem, which is imaginative, the poet has chosen her
words very artistically. She sees in the sunsets "great
fields of crocus," and "waves of iris" that bloom for many a

15 Nance, Flute in the Distance, p. 28.
mile. "Hills in the Rain," the fourth member of the sequence, is another excellent descriptive study which illustrates the poet's ability to depict the scenes of which she is herself a part. She sees the hills as they gleam white as frost through the air. She sees the "woven garments of the mist, the endless showering of crystal rain, and boughs that break with wet, too fondly kissed." "Sea-Wind of the Prairie," discussed earlier with poems of the Southwest, is another interesting study of nature. In "Rio Grande Hills" the poet speaks of the first time that she rode south and viewed the little hills of Mexico across the Rio Grande. Since that time she has seen taller hillsides, but none have ever welcomed her with the same spirit of love and adventure as did these Rio Grande Hills. "In Praise of the Gaudalupe" contains a fitting description of the picturesque old river upon whose banks much of Texas history was made. In the first stanza the poet declares that "if you have seen the Gaudalupe," bright and fair with diamonds sparkling, with cypress, birds, banks of fern, and huisache groves that scent the air, you'll never stoop to smaller streams. In the second stanza she says that "if you have known the Gaudalupe," surrounded by cedar hills, where birds carol through the year and stealthy deer play leisurely, you'll never stoop to larger streams. And, last, she adds:

If you have loved the Guadalupe,
The diamond-bright, the diamond rare,
With emerald pools, a sparkling troop
And lacy falls that flutter there,
And ripple-songs that fill the air,
To other streams you will not stoop,
If you have loved the Guadalupe. 16

"Gentleman" is a surprising little poem, a clever description of the poet's faithful cat whom she calls a "philosopher, a diplomat, with just a dash of autocrat." This cat

loves the carnival of night
And walks the dark with second sight. 17

This same gentleman draws "his courage round him like a cloak." An unusual subject on which to write a poem, though truly pertaining to nature, is Miss Nance's "Mud Wasps." The poet has seen beauty in the "soothing singing of mud wasps in the wall." The choir of wasps brings back memories of early childhood, of far-off summer afternoons.

That Miss Nance knows and understands people is clearly seen in her character studies of human nature. Lucia Trent writes that all of Miss Nance's work is vigorous, and her portraiture is always illuminating. 18 This poet has painted just such a portrait of the editor of a small town newspaper in her poem, "The Country Editor." The poet says that people thought the country editor was a dreamer as they passed him on the street or on the hills. But as he

16 Ibid., p. 21.
17 Ibid., p. 50.
18 Lucia Trent, frontispiece Flute in the Distance.
wrote the chronicles of youth and age,
Who came to town, how much it rained, and when,
And now and then he spread upon the page
A plan to widen life for other men.¹⁹

he planted the seed that later "came to life in works they
thought their own." Buildings rose and highways grew from
thoughts that he had sown. "Crude Artist" is the story of
an artist who came to town when Richard Bell, farmer, was
young. The artist "caught the summer in his net while
Richard watched and held his tongue." The artist went away,
but the farmer boy had been so inspired that he "painted all
his days." His life was a simple but happy one, for his joy
came not from wealth or fame but from nature, "birds and
sunset-flame," and

When he died, the village said
His spirit never had grown dim,
Perhaps the pictures were but daubs.
Yet think of what they did for him.²⁰

"Latin Blood" is an interesting picture of one who loved the
red-and-orange dawn. A sip of whisky caused this one to
sing and play his fiddle so that people left their work un-
done to hear his music. For him life was filled with ro-
mance. He sang as "he worked his farm in drouth and flood,
and lived and died nor ever knew that he had Latin blood."

"Lost Boy" is a pathetic picture of a homesick lad who
was sent to his neighbor's house to school. Miserable and

¹⁹ Nance, Flute in the Distance, p. 33.
²⁰ Ibid., p. 35.
unhappy in his new surroundings, the boy cried to go home. One day while his teacher's hands "were full, he hurried forth." After forty men had combed the prairie north and south, they found nothing but "hasty prints of running feet." Fifty years later the people of the countryside often repeated the mournful tale, "and wondered how he died."

"Moonlight," a short study in regular verse, tells the readers why the poet's father hated moonlight. Of him, she writes,

He was an old frontiersman  
And on their deadly raids,  
Comanches rode by moonlight,  
In stealthy cavalades.21

The Comanches took the horses of the settlers, often leaving behind a trail of red; because of the raids her father "came to love the darkness, and hate the moon." "Old Farmer" contains another bit of human experience not unfamiliar. Miss Nance has expressed the thought originally and well, as she tells of the old farmer whose work was ended and whose strength was gone. As long as he lived on his farm he was sustained, for

The farm and he were somehow one,  
In secret bonds of love and pride,  
And when they parted something snapped,—  
For when he moved to town he died.22

"Yellow Roses" expresses the devotion of a man to his mother who had passed away in his very early childhood. Of her he knew little, but he was told of her love for yellow roses.

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 34.}\]  
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 44.}\]
This man grew roses all of his life, but by his door he planted a yellow one.

Miss Nance has written an interesting story of the Queen of England in her "Elizabeth of England." There is nothing new in her version of this familiar story. The poet, however, has shown a depth of feeling and understanding for this woman who felt that because of her position she must be different.

In *Flute in the Distance*, one finds a number of poems of a miscellaneous nature which are worthy of consideration. "Adjustment" contains a bit of well expressed philosophy characteristic of the poet's life. Here she compares her life to chapters in a book, or a game of chess. She says that if her life should end when half played out, she would be spared old age and loneliness. While on the other hand, if she should live to be quite old and helpless, the reader should remember and withhold his tears, for she has "had the all of life" and is satisfied. In "Old Birch House," a rather imaginative lyric, the poet tells her readers that an old house made of brick is reticent and does not prattle of its woes as wooden houses do. Even its ghosts are courteous, for they do not stop and stare. The only way one knows that ghosts are present is by the sudden chill which he feels.

"Chronic Invalid," is a clever aphorism done in a single couplet:
In life's gay banquet hall count him as one
Who still must linger though the feast is done.23

"Poet's Wife" describes the wife of the poet, what she means
to him, and how she inspires and fills his poetry. If one
could properly analyze his poetry, one could find the perfect
picture of his wife's spirit embodied in his orderly ca-
dences. "Automobiles at the Curb" tells of the various
kinds of automobiles parked side by side, some satin-shining
limousines, some worn coupes, some roadsters, some touring
cars with marks "for sale." All of these "rust-battered,
glowing-new" seem to sing to this poet, "Democracy, 'My
country, 'tis of thee!"

The reader notes an absence of poems on themes of love
in Miss Nance's work. However, her poems reflect love for
people in general whom she knows and understands. In one of
her poems entitled "As Others Love People" Miss Nance says
that she has loved words as others have loved people. How-
ever, in her poem "Prairie Love," the poet sounds a new
depth. Here she says that there will be days of suffering
in the steely north when cold winds freeze the shrinking
earth. There will be April days sweetened with notes of
"blue-birds, honey-sweet," with the odor of prairie clover,
gay bluebonnets, and rippling wheat. There will be days in
August when the searing, scorching wind twists the grass.
She sums it all up this way:

23 Nance, Flute in the Distance, p. 48.
There will be sun, dear love, and bitter sky,
But we will be together, you and I.  

The poet expresses her deep appreciation and love for
the finest in music in several short poems on musical themes.
She aptly writes that Beethoven's Symphony-No. 7 contains
"language of another plane." After describing the rapture
with which men listen to this masterpiece, she merely adds,

This is a sacrament which we have found,
And where the echoes die is holy ground.'

In Beethoven's Minuet in G the poet has caught the rhythm of
the minuet for the rhythm of her verse, which is done in
triplet stanzas, with a regular rhyme scheme. The words and
rhythm give a very interesting interpretation of the masters
and maids of long ago as they curtsy low to dance the minuet.

In some measure, "Blue Painting" recalls Wordsworth's
"Daffodils." Both describe lasting pictures of beauty im-
printed on the memory. Miss Nance's memory is a picture in
blue of two girls in Roman dress beside a lake. When her
fancy wanders, or when her subconscious mind is dominant,
she "lingers near those joyous girls in white." Her poem
itself is a flash of color which lingers in the reader's
mind.

In summarizing the study of Miss Nance's volume of
verse, Flute in the Distance, one finds that this poet has
used most of the major poetic forms, although lyrics

\[^{24}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 77.\] \[^{25}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 64.\]
constitute a large portion of her writings. Her sonnets are well done and are, in the main, consistently Italian in form. Although some free verse is found, conventional meter predominates in Miss Nance's volume. Her poems show care in thought and preparation. Miss Nance charms her readers with her interesting figures of speech and her apt expressions.

Her poetry is strong and vigorous with an almost masculine touch. Some of her rhythms are rather set, perhaps too regular, creating at times a feeling of monotony. Some of her poems, such as "Crude Artist" and "Moonlight," are lacking in grace, for they appear stilted or somewhat set.

Although Miss Nance has written some interesting poems on nature and some character studies, the majority of these poems are mediocre and lack inspiration. On the other hand, most of her poems of Texas and the Southwest are definitely inspired. Through these poems Miss Nance has not only preserved an authentic literature of Texas, but she has made a contribution to American literature as well. Her poems, "Cattle" and "Texan" will be read and will be included in anthologies for many years to come.
CHAPTER IV

VAIDA STEWART MONTGOMERY

Another poet whose poems of the Southwest have caused her to be placed as a foremost Texas poet is Vaida Stewart Montgomery. Mrs. Montgomery is not only important as a poet, but, as co-editor of Kaleidograph, a national magazine of poetry, she has been a constant inspiration and help to other poets in the state.

Mrs. Montgomery, who was born in Childress, Texas, of pioneer parentage, sings of the West as one who knows the very heart throb of the prairie. She brings the West to her readers, "in that with her one not only sees, but hears and likewise feels the prairie half-notes, its lamenting minors and infrequent cadenzas."¹

Vaida Stewart, the daughter of William R. and Butriss Flower Stewart, knew the West from earliest childhood. She learned about cowboys, rattlesnakes, cattle, and windmills on the old O X ranch near Childress, where she was reared.

The source of her education was the public schools of Texas, the state which she loves and knows.

In 1927 Miss Stewart became the wife of Whitney Montgomery

¹Vivian Richardson, "Vaida Stewart Montgomery," The Dallas Morning News, December 21, 1931, section 3, p. 3.
of Dallas. Since that time the two Montgomeries have been co-editors and co-publishers of the Kaleidograph Magazine.

Mrs. Montgomery is a member of the Poetry Society of Texas, the Poetry Society of America, and the Texas Institute of Letters. Many of her poems, short stories, and book reviews have been published in leading newspapers and magazines. One of the most informative and interesting contributions which have been made to Texas Literature is Mrs. Montgomery's _A Century With Texas Poets and Poetry_. In this volume there is a list of more than a thousand names of Texas poets. Mrs. Montgomery says in her foreword that she knows many more persons who are spending some time in the writing of verse. _A Century With Texas Poets and Poetry_ is divided into three divisions; the first is devoted to poets of the past, the second to poets of the present, and the third to poets who were at one time residents of the state, but who now reside elsewhere.

Mrs. Montgomery is also the author of a series of handbooks which are called "Help Yourself Handbooks." These are written in order that the novice may read and become instructed in data which all ambitious poets need. _Verse Technique Simplified_ is especially helpful and contains materials which the average teacher of English frequently needs. Others of this series are: _Signs and Markers_, _Verse Forms, Old and New_, _The Practical Rhymer_, _Secrets of Selling Verse_, and _First Aid for Fictionists_.

In addition to her fiction, Mrs. Montgomery has published a volume of verse which she has called *Locoed and Other Poems*. This book immediately catches the eye of the reader because of its cover and format. Will James, the artist, has caught the atmosphere of the contents of the volume in his clever illustration of the locoed calf and the prairie. The charm of the exterior is an excellent introduction to the poet found within the volume. One feels her vivid personality, her freedom from everything which might be termed affectation. Hilton R. Greer says that the greater number of her poems have a "salty hardness."

For this reason the first book by this Texan met with favorable reception from reviewers throughout the nation who were surfeited with the other sort. Yet... there is none of the 'whooppe-ti-yi of the traditional cowboy ballads in it. The verse treats of the starker, and sometimes bitter side of life on the Western Plains in an earlier day. ²

J. Frank Dobie, the author of *Coronado's Children*, has this to say of Mrs. Montgomery's verses:

> It is not enough to say that Vaida Stewart Montgomery has been there. Many people have been there. She has seen, has felt something, there. To report this something, definitely and movingly, she has wrestled with the technique so necessary to the effective expression of anything. ³

Free verse predominates in Mrs. Montgomery's poetry; however, rhymed verse is frequently found. She especially

favors the couplet, as is noted in "Funeral":

They mill around a stack of bones,
And grieve their dead in plaintive moans.

And in "Thirst"

The windmill whines as the wheel turns 'round
Plunging the rod beneath the ground.  

Included in her volume of poetry, the reader finds most of the major verse forms. There are sonnets, one sonnet sequence, narratives, and lyrics. This poet has achieved some interesting effects in monologues, which form she has offered in "Locoed," in "Corralled," and in "Loneliness." But it is in her narratives that she is at her best, for it is in this form that the poet is most at ease and most herself. The lyrics, on the whole, such as "The Wind," are not so natural with the poet, and sometimes seem strained.

Perhaps the chief characteristic of Mrs. Montgomery's style is her directness. When she is writing of the West, the subject she knows best, one feels as though she is talking directly to the reader. Her thought flows freely and smoothly. There is nothing of romance to be found, but stark realism abounds in her works. In fact, she paints her pictures so vividly, so realistically, that one has a feeling akin to nausea after reading "Thirst," which pictures cattle with "perishing bodies, shriveled and thinned," as they wait

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4Vaida Stewart Montgomery, Locoed and Other Poems, p. 28. All poems referred to in this study will be found in this volume.
for water at the wind-mill. She has carefully chosen her words to fit the meaning which she has tried to convey. Although she uses very little dialect, her language is that of the plains people or cattle folk. She employs figures of speech frequently, but, as a rule, these are likewise drawn from the prairie. For instance, in "Tamed" she uses figurative language in saying:

Yes, Life,
I understand:
I must be bridle-wise
Before I enter pastures of Success.\(^5\)

Again in "Stampede" she says her "thoughts like cattle, roam the pastures" of her mind. She employs interesting sound effects in the following lines: "The Windmill whines as the wheel turns round." Twice in "Prairie Lover" and in "The Mask," the poet compares the face of the prairie to a woman's face. In "Vocabulary," however, she speaks of "decking her thoughts in silks and silver lace."

Although Mrs. Montgomery has written on varied themes, her poems of the West are definitely her best. And it is in the poem "Locoed" that this poet brings the West so realistically to her reader. A monologue in free verse, this poem tells the story of a locoed yearling, and states in the beginning,

I am a locoed yearling
My father was the boldest bull
That ever roamed the West.\(^6\)

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 28. \(^6\)Ibid., p. 2.
His mother, too, was well born, and proudly walked with "head erect with the foremost of the herd." The yearling admits that he, too, might have been the peer of any monarch of the plains if he "had not chewed the loco weed" before the "taste of milk was off his tongue." This experience stunted his growth and he became a "dogy." Following the herd when ranchers were forced to move their cattle to water, the dogy soon fell behind. So feeble were his efforts that "lazy vultures circled over head." At this point the poet brings about a pathetic contrast, or perhaps comparison, for she has the dogy calf rescued by a lonely homesteader, who was himself no more than a shadow. On discovering the yearling, the homesteader asks bitterly:

Did those scoundrels cut you out?
Leave you without a chance!
That's the way they serve a weakling—
Cut us out, without a chance.

In "Prairie-Born" the poet writes that as a child of the prairie she was pitied because she had never known the sea. Finally, when she stood upon the shore, the roar of waves meant stampeding cattle with hoofs and horns in battle. She saw the prairie green in the water, hordes of tumble weeds dashed to bits by the waves. Against the horizon she pictures sombreros and cowboys riding out of sight.

"Funeral" is a realistic picture of the mourning of cattle over the carcass of their dead brother, who was,

\*Ibid., p. 5.*
before he fell,
A victim of drouth or of stampede's hell.
The poet uses figurative language in "Stampede" to compare her thoughts to cattle that "roam the pastures" of her mind. Using five heroic couplets, Mrs. Montgomery very briefly paints a picture familiar to many Texans in her poem "Thirst." Cattle, desperate for water, wait at the wind mill where the stronger ones hold a place at trough
Sipping gyp-nectar: the weak horned off,
Plead with a sadder sound than the mill
As it dies with the wind and stands stock still.\(^8\)

And again in the heroic couplet form the poet states in "I Am Desert" that no artist or singer has ever been able to interpret the desert, which is to all alike a mystery. She asks in closing:

Who can snare with pen or brush
That phantom thing, the desert hush?
And where is the singer who can release
The bars that prison the desert's peace?\(^9\)

Mrs. Montgomery uses free verse with no definite rhythm to paint a very pathetic picture in "Prairie Panorama." The first picture, called "Noon," depicts a rather tranquil scene of fenceless prairie "dotted with longhorn cattle and bare-limbed mesquite trees." The herd is still lean from a long and dreary winter. As the midday sun smiles upon the

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 12.  \(^9\)Ibid., p. 14.
scene, the river forms a back-ground as of "painted canvas
daubed with the green of scrub cedars." The second picture
called "Midnight" shows the "timid herd bedded down for
sleep." A pack of wolves howls distantly in the distance, a
bunch of coyotes utters hungry, lonely wails. The cattle
begin to stir; the mothers move closer to their young calves,
protectingly. Swiftly a breeze hurls a rolling weed into
the herd. At this signal

The cattle rose as one, trembling with fear,
And huddled for a moment before the maddened run;
Hoarse bull-bellowed mingled with the moan
Of frenzied mothers, as their young
Fell trampled underfoot.  

Frightened, the cattle, with hoofs and horns clashing and
dashing, plunged with a sickening thud into the canyon
beneath. In the last picture, "Morning," the poet says
quietly:

Sunrise and the chastened wind
Sobbed through the quiet canyons
A requiem.  

"Corralled" is an imaginative little poem in monologue,
in which the poet has a tumble weed describe its travel after
it has been uprooted. An odd subject for a poem, and yet one
typically Western, is found in "The Rattlesnake." The poet
uses this medium to tell of an incident in her early child-
hood when a rattlesnake was coiled and ready to strike her
in her bed. Mrs. Montgomery's father shot the snake's head

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 17.
off, and "turned the shining belly to the sun." The poet, in spite of this experience, pays her respect to the rattler in her last stanza,

And yet, Old Rattlesnake, I honor you;
You are a partner of the pioneer:
You claim your own, as you've a right to do--
This was your Eden--I intruded here.\(^\text{12}\)

Comparing the prairie's breast with her own placid brow, Mrs. Montgomery has given her readers "Inscrutable," a highly imaginative sketch in six regularly rhymed lines. The poet has marveled over the canyons that time has cleft across the face of the prairie. She finds on her own brow furrows that have been left by the passing years. "The Mask," somewhat similar in thought to "Inscrutable," is another short lyric with regular rhyming. In this picture the poet compares the prairie's face, as it is parched by summer's heat, to the face of a "wrinkled woman, shorn of every trace of beauty." In winter the brow of the prairie is powdered deftly with winter snow, which covers the flaws and furrows hidden there. Yet the poet ponders:

Beneath that calm and enigmatic mask
Behold, is Life and Spring and Love and Youth.\(^\text{13}\)

Except for the arrangement of the verse and stanzas, "Loneliness," a monologue, would make good prose. So vividly has the poet told the story of a lonely cowboy's dying in a great city that the reader feels that loneliness. The cowboy

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 20.  \(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 26.
longs for the West where all are kin and strangers are treated as honor guests. Even though he is under the shadow of huge skyscrapers and rubs shoulders with countless thousands, he knows no one. He longs for the lowing herd, the "caressing breath of prairie breezes," the "splendor of a desert sunset." With his head upon his saddle he longs to face the moon and stars as he "listens to the music of the coyotes." As the boy's life grows weaker, he calls

Get back with your infernal instruments
And endless needle-pickings!
I heard my pony neigh!

Yes Pinto! coming, old man!
I'm coming!  

Using the Italian form for her sonnet sequence, Mrs. Montgomery tells a tale of authentic chuck-wagon lore in "The Whistler." The gruesome story tells of a method of healing young Jim, the whistler, a tenderfoot. Jim was placed in a grave, with his head above the ground. In this position he was to remain for a given number of hours in order that the earth might absorb his pain. When told of the plan,

Jim grinned and said he wouldn't mind a speck,
An' so we planted him, up to the neck.

The men who "planted Jim" went inside Buck's Saloon where they forgot Jim in their drinking and gambling. When finally they remembered Jim and rushed out to look for him,

14 Ibid., p. 25.
Whistling Jim was nowhere to be found,
The wolves had eat his head off to the ground.\textsuperscript{15}

In a number of her miscellaneous poems, Mrs. Montgomery shows a feeling of frustration or disappointment in her own work. The problem of self-expression without affectation or insincerity seems insurmountable. In "Sincerity" she urges that sincerity rather than vanity, be expressed in verse. In "Reincarnation" the poet says that from the time she lay in her mother's womb, she had "been marked by the hand of doom." It seems that all of her life has been sorely troubled, for there has been a constant

Warring with words--and warring with song,
A futile battle my whole life long.

The poet says that she expects no change, even in death:

Quarreling in death as I quarreled in birth--
Pitying him who next shall inherit
This turbulent, tortured, unquenchable spirit.\textsuperscript{16}

In "Amateur" the poet again shows this dissatisfaction, for she says:

Now I see cues
That I have neglected,
Many a line
I might have perfected.\textsuperscript{17}

In "Intransigeant" the poet says that she is not content to spend her time with hackneyed rhymes. She finds "no pleasure in the borrowed phrase." Rather she prefers to remain

\textsuperscript{15}ibid., p. 34. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{16}ibid., p. 37. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{17}ibid., p. 50.
silent, for why should she sing if her song fails to rise as high as possible. In conclusion she states:

I am not satisfied, nor shall I be
Till I have conquered mediocrity.\textsuperscript{18}

Feeling that her thoughts were commonplace when clothed in words which she knew, the poet tells in "Vocabulary" that she borrowed words of gold and filigree and "decked her thoughts in silks and silver lace." The effect was lost, however, for the thoughts did not seem hers when dressed in "their borrowed finery."

There are several other poems of a miscellaneous nature which are worthy of mentioning. In a clever unrhymed poem, Mrs. Montgomery describes the stout women and the anaemic women who look "important" at a "Literary Tea." Each one has written a poem, a play, or a pageant, not one of which has been published. The poet has decided that the reason she cannot join in so complacently is that

\begin{quote}
some rude joker
Has placed in the cushion
With the point turned upward
The tack of ambition.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

The thought content and the realistic description are pleasing in the "Sonnet To Lake Cliff." The lake, surrounded by trees, harbors ducks, swans, and song birds that mingle their thankful melodies. People passing by on trolley cars are refreshed by this scene,

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 41. \quad \textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 51.
This placid spot so near the busy mart
And yet so near, so near to nature's heart.20

Another poem of interest is one in which Mrs. Montgomery says "My Sister Was A Poet," even though she had never written a line of rhyme; for

She knew the stars by name and loved them all,
She knew the woods where dusky shadows fall,
She knew the secrets of the winds that pass,
The murmuring of insects in the grass.21

"Precision" shows the poet's love for nature's planning, for she cries that she is tired of "houses row on row" and of city streets precisely planned. Instead, she longs for the "primal wood, where God's trees grow as all trees really should," She loves the "inprecision" of the stars in the skies and is thankful for the "Designer who was so wise."

"Sacrificial," a brief but colorful poem, is a solemn picture of winter in which the poet describes the earth veiled in a white shroud of pity. The poet concludes,

So much of Beauty has to die,
To give the winter birth.22

Using the heroic couplet, a form which she handles with ease, the poet in "Memorabilia" has described a visit to the home of Berta Hart Nance. The home is exactly what one would expect it to be after having read the poems of Miss Nance, and having corresponded with her. There is the flagstone walk, gay flowers brought from the field, a table set for tea with

20 Ibid., p.
21 Ibid., p. 38.
22 Ibid., p. 53.
the newest books and magazines comfortably near. In recalling the visit Mrs. Montgomery writes:

And I can see you as you sat and played your violin, I loved the cunning way you tucked it underneath your chin
In time these memories may fade—the yellow flagstone walk,
The little table set for tea, your music and your talk—
And I could see them go, nor grieve, for time cannot erase
My vision of your shining soul, your kindly, smiling face.23

A study of the poetry of Mrs. Vaida Stewart Montgomery has revealed her to be primarily a poet of the Southwest. Free verse is found to predominate in her poems; however, she makes frequent use of the couplet and heroic couplet, as well as rhymed lyrics. A few sonnets are included in her volume. These have been consistently well worked out according to the old Italian form. Monologues are often used effectively; however, Mrs. Montgomery's best effects are found in her narratives, in which form her thoughts flow smoothly and she seems at ease. Some of her lyrics, on the other hand, are a little strained and amateurish.

The chief characteristic of Mrs. Montgomery's style is her directness. Her pictures are painted and her stories are told in a straightforward, realistic manner. She has not painted the West with glamorous pen; but, instead, her pictures are vivid and realistic. It is when writing of

West Texas, the land which she loves, that she brings the wind and atmosphere of the prairie directly to her readers. Of herself the poet writes:

Not in the fastnesses of civilization--
Not in the city's milling throngs--
But in the vastnesses of desolation,
My heart belongs.

These are the sources of my inspiration--
These things shall haunt me till the day I die:
The wind's moan, the wild wolf's ululation,
The kildee's cry.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 13.
CHAPTER V

GRACE NOLL CROWELL

Because of her utter sincerity and her human understanding of the simple things of life, Grace Noll Crowell is loved and admired by her readers both in America and in England. Since "her little songs go straight to the hearts of her readers who find in them encouragement and hope, she comes near to having universal appeal." \(^1\)

Although Texas proudly claims this poet, she is not a native of the state, but was born in Inland, Iowa, in 1877. A few years later the family moved to Wilton, Iowa, where Grace spent most of her childhood days on the Noll farm, "Sunnyside." It was here that she received her education; after graduation from the high school, she attended the German-English College in Wilton.

In 1901 Miss Noll married Norman H. Crowell, who was a writer and contributor to The American Magazine. In 1917 Mr. Crowell moved his family to Wichita Falls, Texas, where, for some time, he worked in the oil business. When Mr. Crowell decided to devote his entire time to writing, he

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\(^1\) W. F. Bigelow, editor of Good Housekeeping Magazine, in the frontispiece to Splendor Ahead, Harper and Brothers, 1940.
moved with his wife and their three sons to Dallas, Texas, in which city the family has continued to reside.

After having made several attempts at writing verse as a child, and having met with discouragement from her practical family, the little girl, saddened and crushed, "put away her pad and pencil."\(^2\) It was not until years later, when she had a child of her own, that Grace Noll Crowell picked up this pad and pencil again. After the birth of three small sons Mrs. Crowell's health began to weaken and later failed entirely.

For weary months she lay... waiting for pain to cease, for sleep to come, for strength to revive, for a gleam. 'Dark useless days,' she called them. Days when the helplessness of an infant son cried to her, also the needs of a little house. And she must be still -- still.\(^3\)

For years Mrs. Crowell remained an invalid, indoors, away from contacts with the outside world. While in this condition, her writing became a comfort to her. She longed to write things that would help people and make them happier.

Her first poem, "Marshland," which her husband said was fair, was accepted by the editor of *The Outing Magazine*. This first check for five dollars seemed enormous to the young poet and was, of course, spent for something to beautify her simple home. After that each check so received was


\(^3\) Ibid.
used to bring added comfort for the home. The poet felt that this made up, in a way, for what she could not do, because of her illness.

Many of Mrs. Crowell's best poems have been the outgrowth of her long hours of illness. Some of these poems have been published in collected form in *Songs For Courage*, which are more often found under the pillows of a hospital bed than between book ends. Doctors write of their being passed from hand to hand along the friendly wards of suffering until they literally fall to pieces; of their being carried to the very threshold of heaven on the whisper of the dying.\(^4\)

In recognition of Mrs. Crowell's ability as a poet, the legislative committee in Austin, under the leadership of Representative Albert G. Walker of Vernon, in 1935, named her Poet Laureate of Texas. Her selection was made by the committee on the basis of recommendations of three judges. Six selected poems of each of forty-one applicants for the honor were considered by Dr. L. W. Payne, Jr., of the University of Texas English department, Dr. A. J. Armstrong of the Baylor University English department, and Dr. Rebecca Smith of the Texas Christian University English department.\(^5\)

Another unusual and signal honor came to this poet when, in 1938, the Golden Rule Foundation in New York named Grace Noll Crowell the American Mother of 1938. It was thought that the numerous poems which Mrs. Crowell had written on

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 23.

children and motherhood might have been important factors in determining her selection from a nation-wide list of nominations for this honor. The fact that she has three splendid sons, the sources of inspiration for many of her poems, was without doubt the controlling factor in the selection. When Mrs. Crowell was introduced to the nation by the American Press and by coast to coast broadcasts over three networks as the American Mother of 1938, she was presented with a gold medal and the following citation:

Grace Noll Crowell, Mother of three sons now grown to manhood, finding positions in the financial, artistic and educational life of our country; Creator, with your loyal and faithful husband, of a home where joy and peace shine forth as a beacon light; Exemplar, often through pain and discomfort, of those noble virtues of courage, faith and hopefulness; Glorifier of the common task; Poet of all the people; Author of stanzas that sing their way into our minds and hearts; Grace Noll Crowell, you once wrote of another words so true of you:

God trusted you with beauty and you keep That trust as sacred, for you have grown wise; Your still ways are still waters running deep, And life is mirrored in your quiet eyes. God trusts so few with beauty - oh, so few, He must have been so very sure of you.6

Following closely her selection as the American Mother, Mrs. Crowell was presented with the Golden Scroll Medal of Honor as National Honor Poet of the twelfth annual celebration of poetry week by Anita Browne, founder-organizer of Poetry Week. "Recipients of this honor in previous years

6Beatrice Flumb, Grace Noll Crowell, The Poet and The Woman, p. 44.
include the late Edwin Arlington Robinson, Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, and Robert P. Tristram Coffin.\textsuperscript{7}

Mrs. Crowell's first volume of collected verse, \textit{White Fire} published in 1925, won the first annual book contest award by the Poetry Society of Texas. Since that time her publications have included \textit{Silver in the Sun}, \textit{Miss Humpty Comes to Tea}, \textit{Flame in the Wind}, \textit{Songs for Courage}, \textit{Light of the Years}, \textit{This Golden Summit}, and \textit{Songs of Hope}. Besides her collected volumes, Mrs. Crowell has been a regular contributor to many magazines in the United States and in England.

Most of Mrs. Crowell's poems are short, and the majority are lyric in form. Besides the many little songs she has written, there are a number of sonnets and a few sonnet sequences, of which her best is the one on "Birth, Life, and Death." There are a few narratives; among them are "Pedro and I" and "The Peddler," both of which are done in free verse. Mrs. Crowell has experimented in free verse in a number of her poems, but the results, almost unvaryingly, are poor; the rhythm is often either jarring or monotonous. The rhythm of "Kitchens," which is done in free verse, is very uneven and jagged. It is fortunate that Mrs. Crowell has chosen to write rhymed verse and lyrics more often than

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p. 44.
free verse and narratives, because she uses the former mediums much more effectively.

The style of Mrs. Crowell's poetry is characterized by its sincerity and lack of affectation. Her poems have a spiritual quality as well as purposefulness. Because she has suffered and has triumphed, her works are filled with a high courage. Because it has been God who has given her the courage, her works are filled with a deep faith. This courage and this faith are embodied in the lines of her poetry. These are the qualities which make her writings a comfort to people in distress. However, people who are not in distress often feel that there is an over-optimism, and over-sentimentality in Mrs. Crowell's works.

As stated before, Mrs. Crowell's poetry is written simply and without affectation. She certainly has not affected any kind of literary style. She has used figurative language infrequently and not too effectively. Her choice of words is often regrettable; it sometimes makes a sensitive reader shudder. In fact, the lack of poetic diction is one of the greatest faults of Mrs. Crowell's poetry.

Mrs. Crowell's poems on the home or homey things are her best. She has glorified the home until she has made it glitter and shine. To many women, the tasks of housekeeping are monotonous and drab. They despise dish-washing, bread-making and those things which must, of necessity, be a part
of women's sphere. These home duties have inspired this poet to write:

I have found such joy in simple things,
A plain clean room, a nut-brown loaf of bread,
A cup of milk, a kettle as it sings,
The shelter of a roof above my head.8

This same joy is expressed in the poem "I Have A Little House." In this poem she says:

I have a little house
Where a shining clock ticks
And a primrose blooms on the sill.9

"Dusk on the Hill Road"10 and "Evening"11 picture the lighted lamps of home that greet and cheer the loved one as he returns to his haven of rest and contentment.

"My Hearth Fire," an imaginative poem, in rhymed verse with somewhat irregular rhythm, describes the poet nestled comfortably by her warm fire, when the night is very cold and the moon is pale. In her fancy she visits with friends whom she invites to share with her the comforts of her home.

"Windows That Shine" shows Mrs. Crowell's joy in passing homes that are lighted in the evening; she loves to catch a glimpse of rooms

All lovely in the light
Of shaded lamps, where families meet
To warm their hearts at night.12

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8 Grace Noll Crowell, Light of the Years, p. 13.
10 Ibid., p. 87. 11 Ibid., p. 84.
12 Ibid., p. 34.
"Kitchens" is another picture of a contented wife and homemaker. Mrs. Crowell has so completely described everything found within this room that it has the effect of making one away from her home long for her own kitchen, where she too may "beat white eggs to a foam." Mrs. Crowell again calls attention to the intimate things - those things which are usually taken for granted - in "A Song of Little Streets" and "Sunday Afternoon."

"The Picture" is descriptive of a quiet restful room, unencumbered by useless, unnecessary things that require so much of one's time. The poet, who has realized the burden of these useless things, envies the quiet simplicity of this home; she says:

I count them - the sweet content, the rest
Of simple things.

"In Simplicity" the poet explains that those who are rich miss many of the real joys of life that come through gradually accumulating the household needs - a flowered plate, or a quaint gay cup. The poet continues:

I pity the woman who can never know
The keen delight that some small thing gives!
A new stove singing its golden song
Into a room where a family lives,
A new rug blossoming on the floor,
Where an old worn one has been before.

13 Ibid., p. 68.  
14 Ibid., p. 25.  
15 Ibid., p. 30.  
16 Ibid., p. 29.  
17 Grace Noll Crowell, Silver in the Sun, p. 38.
Many expressions of appreciation find their way daily into the home of Grace Noll Crowell. In writing to thank Mrs. Crowell for a recital which she had given for a Junior Matron's Club, a minister's wife said:

You did what I hoped you would. They came to me wide-eyed and often wet-eyed, to say 'She has revolutionized our ideas about housework. We are going back to make our houses into homes.' You have helped them more than a year of man-made sermons.\textsuperscript{18}

Mrs. Crowell has also included within her volumes many interesting nature poems. Birds and flowers are constant sources of inspiration for her. The cardinal, as its scarlet threads go "whistling through the rain," delights her. She writes that the mocking bird is "music mad" as he uses the sky for his choir loft and the stars as notes on which he plays. She loves the sparrows because they were her companions during her long illness.

In Wild Asters" the poet says that although we apparently do not see these humble blossoms of late September as they bloom in the roadside dust, in years to come we may remember them. Perhaps some memory, bitter, sweet, will make us see them, this time "glimmering through a wash of tears." The poet associates "wet Lilacs" in the rain with some one whom she has loved who has passed away. Now when she sees wet lilacs, memories of this loved one come back to her and she writes:

\textsuperscript{18}Beatrice Plumb, \textit{Grace Noll Crowell}, p. 40.
I could cry with the sweetness of this April hour,
My heart could break with this poignant pain.19

In describing "Silver Poplars" Mrs. Crowell says she believes that "God wrote his loveliest poem" when he made the silver poplar tree.20 "I Grieve for Beauty Wasted" describes the beauties of the sunsets on the prairies. The poet grieves that these beauties are but momentary. She wishes that God could keep this beauty for a lover of "sky and wind and flower,"

And then some autumn twilight,
God let him come and reap it;
A million years of splendor
In one breathless hour.21

Mrs. Crowell uses a little figurative poem which she calls "My Heart" in describing her different moods. First she describes her heart as a crimson bird, next as a white-capped wave, and last as a still brown nest.22 The poet is declaring her oneness with nature in "Windy Twilight." She loves the wind; she loves to feel the cold wind blowing against her face. She cries out:

To be one with the wind’s own mad elation,
O, heart - it is a wonderful thing.23

And in "Summer Wind" the poet sees the poetry of earth, as

20 Ibid., p. 15.
21 Ibid., p. 25.
22 Ibid., p. 28.
23 Ibid., p. 13.
it runs through the wind, "like green-gold ribbons, and like scarlet flame."24

Mrs. Crowell's third volume of verse, Miss Humpty Comes to Tea, and Other Poems is devoted entirely to poems on childhood or poems for children. This volume has been cleverly illustrated by a young Dallas artist, Dorothy Hearon, and is interesting for adults as well as for children. The poems about Miss Humpty have a rollicking lilt to them that is most pleasing. When Miss Humpty comes to tea or goes shopping, all of the children are happy, and want to go with her. As she walks home with her basket, she tells of the beautiful things that they bought in the town:

"There's satins and velvets and ribbons and laces, 
And slippers of silver to dance in the breeze--" 
But all we could see when we looked in the basket, 
Was thread and bologna and crackers and cheese.25

"O Beautiful Boy" is a song from the heart of a mother of sons. The poet sees boys who have been well-reared, clean, with all of life before them. Then she is reminded that war stalks like a tiger over the world, and that American mothers as well as many other mothers have reared their sons "for something better than war."26 Mrs. Crowell wrote "Sons" after suddenly realizing that her sons had grown too tall for

24Crowell, Flame in the Wind, p. 3.
25Crowell, Miss Humpty Comes to Tea, p. 15.
26Crowell, Splendor Ahead, p. 46.
her to stoop down to kiss. Now she must "reach up to kiss their lips." She knows that she soon will have to share these sons, but she is glad that she has

Clean sons to give
That other sons may live.\textsuperscript{27}

"Little Boy" is another of her childhood poems that is appealing in its simplicity. In "Fundamental" Mrs. Crowell writes that she asked her little boy the question, "What makes a home?" The child answered:

"You, mother, and when father comes
Our table set all shiny, and my bed.
And Mother,
I think it's home
Because we love each other."\textsuperscript{28}

These, after all, are the fundamentals of a home.

So successful has Mrs. Crowell been in her attempt to comfort people in distress through her religious poems, that she has published several volumes of poetry of this character. Among these are \textit{Songs for Courage}, \textit{Splendor Ahead}, and \textit{Songs of Hope}. Many of her best poems have been the outgrowth of weary hours of illness. Of these "Wait," "A Prayer For Courage," and "This, Too, Will Pass" are perhaps her most famous. In the first of these the poet gives of her own experience to comfort those who must wait; she says in closing:

\textsuperscript{27}Crowell, \textit{Flame in the Wind}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{28}Crowell, \textit{Silver in the Sun}, p. 10.
For I have waited through the dark, and I have seen a star rise in the blackest sky. Repeatedly -- it has not failed me yet. And I have learned God never will forget To light His lamp. If we but wait for it, It will be lit. 29

"A Prayer For Courage" is a sincere petition:

God make me brave, for life,  
Oh, braver than this!  
Let me straighten after pain, 
As a tree straightens after the rain, 
Shining and lovely again. 30

The poet has learned through her suffering that pain will pass -- it cannot last forever. This has taught her to say:

Out of your deepest sorrow, out of your grief, 
No hurt can last forever, perhaps tomorrow will bring relief. 31

Another of her poems of faith, one that has also seemed to strengthen those who recently have known sorrow, is found in "I Think That God Is Proud" --

pride of those who bear  
A sorrow bravely -- proud indeed of them  
Who walk straight through the dark to find Him there. 32

Mrs. Crowell has received letters of appreciation and gifts from persons from all walks of life who have been strengthened and comforted through her poems. One gift which was most touching was a battered box of wilted wild flowers

29 Crowell, Light of the Years, p. 5.  
31 Crowell, Light of the Years, p. 15.  
gathered from the thin soil about a mountain cabin. Within were these words, "To thank you, lady."33

In the group of miscellaneous poems there are several which should be mentioned. "Pedro and I," a narrative written in free verse, tells the story of the brown-skinned Pedro as he goes to buy food for his small family. When his eyes fall upon a picture of the "Christ hanging tortuously upon a jagged cross," Pedro crosses his heart. Instead of buying bread and fruit for Maria and little Antonio, Pedro's crumpled bill passes from his hands as he grasps his picture with reverent fingers. The poet, as she watches, feels a kinship with Pedro; she adds:

My need is also greater
For the continuous presence
Of the White Christ in my little room,
Than for bread or for fruit -- this day.34

"The Peddler,"35 another narrative, is the story of a poor blind man who came to Mrs. Crowell's door selling notions. Without a hint of charity the poet bought thimbles and thread which she did not need.

"Dim Road," a sonnet, is a description of a once traveled road where, in days long gone by, "old wagons creaked their slow way home." Using descriptive words to paint her pictures, the poet says the old forgotten road is "drugged

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34 Crowell, White Fire, p. 58.
35 Crowell, Flame in the Wind, p. 86.
with sleep" and cannot remember the "tramp of tired feet," nor the wagons as they creaked homeward with their load. The poet likes the peace of this dim road in contrast to the paved roads that glitter and shine. The Day," a well-written lyric, expresses Mrs. Crowell's optimism, her philosophy of life; she says:

Each day will bring some lovely thing,
Some gay adventurous thing to hold
Against my heart when it is gone,
And so I rise and go to meet
The day with wings upon my feet.

Perhaps one of the best known of Grace Noll Crowell's poems is "Heritage." In this poem, Mrs. Crowell explains her love for the South. Her mother was a southern woman, according to the poem, and her father, a stoic product of the North who could never understand his wife's longing for the "languid South";

But hidden in my veins she left to me
A smouldering passion for white Southern moons,
And soft warm winds that sweep up from the sea.

Mrs. Crowell is glad that she has found the land her mother loved: "soft winds, and great stars leaning close from Southern skies." She loves the fields, the laughing rows of cotton, the prairies. In closing, she adds:

And I have found her shimmering plains at last!
Wide miles of sweet green cleanness everywhere,
Where distant, miraged silver waters lie,
And one grows drunken on the thin bright air.

36 Ibid., p. 7.
37 Crowell, Silver in the Sun, p. 5.
Her woods and coastlands call me as their own,
How may they hear the answer from my mouth?
"O, land of many lands -- I am your own --
Prenatally, forever, of the South!"\textsuperscript{38}

A study of Mrs. Crowell's poetry has revealed that she has favored the lyric form, although there are a few narratives found in her volumes. There are a number of sonnets and a few sonnet sequences, most of which have followed the Shakespearean pattern. Mrs. Crowell has written some free verse, but, on the whole, her rhymed verse is better. The rhythm, however, is often either jarring or monotonous.

Sincerity and lack of affectation characterize the style of Mrs. Crowell's writings. Her poems have purposefulness and a spiritual quality. Mrs. Crowell has grown courageous through suffering, and through her poetry she has been able to lend courage and faith to many who need just such help. She has not tried to affect any kind of literary style, and although she has used some figurative speech, she is more effective in the plainer language.

Perhaps the reason that Mrs. Crowell is one of the most widely read poets in America today is that her works are easily understood and contain a message of faith and hope. To her biographer, Beatrice Plumb, Mrs. Crowell said, "Deal gently with me and my simple work."\textsuperscript{39} And although her poems

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{39}Beatrice Plumb, Grace Noll Crowell, The Poet and The Woman, p. 35.
may lay no claim to literary fame, Mrs. Crowell has certainly made a worthy contribution to her generation, both in her state and in her nation.
CHAPTER VI

FAY M'CORMICK YAUGER

As varied and as fascinating as her poetry is the story of Fay M'Cormick Yauger's own life. As co-winner of the Kaliedograph book contest Award in 1933, Mrs. Yauger's Planter's Charm has won its way into the hearts of many lovers of poetry. Although Mrs. Yauger is not a native of the state, she adopted Texas as her home at an early age. And it is in Texas that all her poetry has been written.

Mrs. Yauger says that because of her father's "itching feet" her family "trekked from one southern Idaho farm to another"\(^1\) until she was seven years of age. Longing as she did for a piece of land of her own—a settled existence—the mother, Mrs. M'Cormick, took cuttings from one farm to another, but "she never stayed long enough in one place to see a tree of her own setting come to fruit." Having tired of the dullness and monotony of farm life, and having heard that men were getting rich digging gold in the mountains of Nevada, Mr. M'Cormick "beguiled" his wife into mortgaging their last farm. In a short time the M'Cormick family was joint owner of a miner's supply store across the Idaho

\(^1\) Correspondence with Mrs. Yauger, June, 1942.
border, in Nevada. The life here was sufficiently exciting to hold even so adventurous a soul as her father; so six years passed while Fay grew into young girlhood. Mrs. Yauger describes many interesting experiences which they enjoyed in this somewhat isolated country where the Guggenheims had their holdings. Snowed in, as they were for several months of the year, members of the camp enjoyed ice-skating, sled- ding and "skiing" down the mountainsides on runners made from barrel staves. Dancing was a favorite pastime of the entire camp, including remittance men and gamblers. Young engineers on the pay roll of the Guggenheims, prospectors grown old in the quest of gold, others gone a little daft by reason of the isolation and loneliness, "women of unquestioned virtue, and women whose virtue was not so unquestioned, old and young, rich and poor, heeled it right merrily throughout the night to the tunes lifted to the rafters by an old Swede on an accordian, a genteel lady on a rattly old piano, and a young college man on a fiddle."²

The beauty of her surroundings somewhat compensated for the lack of childhood companionship; and, though lonely at times, Mrs. Yauger thinks of her childhood as an "exquisite dream."

Mr. M'Cormick suddenly tired of mining and sold his holdings to the Guggenheims "for a sum that might, with care, ²Ibid.
have kept him comfortably to a good old age. But, Mrs. Yauger adds, "dad was not a careful man. So the nice fat check went into oil holdings in Wyoming and was gone in six months."³

Mrs. Yauger and her mother then settled in a little town in southern Idaho where her brother was a senior in the state University, and where Fay had her first year of high school work. This was the only year of her high school life which was uninterrupted. Following this, she went to high school in Twin Falls, Idaho, in Long Beach, California, in Wichita Falls, Texas, and finished her high school work at Lindenwood College at St. Charles, Missouri. Her freshman year of college work was also done at Lindenwood.

Mrs. Yauger says that during the time she was in Lindenwood College, her "father was riding on the crest of a momentary oil success. But something happened as it always did with him." Mrs. Yauger was, consequently, unable to return to school, and for some months before her marriage, she supported herself in the business world. She was not satisfied with her education, however, and at the age of twenty-four she entered the Junior College in Wichita Falls, where she was living; at the age of twenty-five she attended the Emerson College of Oratory. It was not until two years later, in 1929, that Mrs. Yauger began writing poetry.

³Ibid.
Mrs. Yauger is a member of the Poetry Society of America and Poetry Society of Texas. In 1931 she won the annual prize of one hundred dollars offered by the Poetry Society of America for the best poem submitted to them in that particular year. This poem, "Planter's Charm," was the inspiration for the title of Mrs. Yauger's book of verse. "County Fair" won first prize in a national poetry contest conducted by Kaleidograph Magazine. Since that time Mrs. Yauger's verse has won for her many awards and has been printed in many of the leading magazines of the country.

Mrs. Yauger, in speaking of her philosophy of life, says that she likes life—likes its "struggles and difficulties." She writes that she is "looking forward to the time after the war when we shall continue to live in an existence that is purposeful and filled with labor, but lacking the horror and sorrow that characterizes our time today." She likes people and books and flowers and writing. She has a son and a house to keep. In spite of many duties, she finds time for her writing and has almost finished a novel. Mrs. Yauger adds that poetry constitutes her religion, for she believes that poetry is "simply the quest for relationships by which one may arrive at a deeper realization of life's significances."\(^4\)

There is little variation in the structure of Mrs. Yauger's

\(^4\)Ibid.
poetry; she has used only the narrative and the lyric forms, and by far the greater majority of her poems are narratives. Some of these narratives, such as "Planter's Charm" and "One Woman to Another," are excellent ballads. "In a lecture before the Poetry Society of Texas, Dr. John O. Beaty, of Southern Methodist University declared that my poem, 'Planter's Charm,' was the best ballad by a living American woman."5 In the internal structure of Mrs. Yauger's poetry, there is very little variety. She has used the four line stanza repeatedly, employing the dimer, trimeter, and tetrameter lines. At times she mixes her rhythm and uses a combination of these lines within a stanza, as she has in "Heritage." In this poem she has used a combination of iambic and anapestic trimeter and tetrameter very effectively; the first and third lines have four feet, while the second and fourth have only three feet. Many of her poems have only two feet to the line. Always there is a rhyme scheme. Mrs. Yauger has done no blank verse and no free verse.

The style of Mrs. Yauger's poetry is simple and direct. She states what she has to say in as few words as possible, but these few words are invariably well chosen and to the point. Her expressions are taken from everyday language; they are realistic. Her words are the ones which the farmers

5 Ibid.
and ranchers of Texas actually use. She does not speak of irrigation water, she calls it ditch water; she speaks of the dusty sheep smell and clouds the color of tow-cloth sacks. This poet does not draw a picture for her readers; she merely states the main points of her argument and lets the reader draw his own conclusions. Figurative language is found infrequently in her poems, and then it is usually in the lyrics, not the narratives. At times the reader finds traces of humor in Mrs. Yauger's poetry, but it is rather bitter humor, really more irony than anything else. One cannot really laugh at "Draft Girl's Choice" or "I Remember."

The keynote of Mrs. Yauger's poetry is realism, stark realism. This poet has seen something besides the beauties of nature -- she has seen its cruelty. She knows and understands the farmer who has had his crops blown away by sand storms, she knows what a blizzard or a cyclone can mean to a lonely rancher or farmer. These things are not beautiful, yet they, too, are aspects of nature. Perhaps it is because of this dark realism that a certain amount of music is lacking in Mrs. Yauger's poetry.

Mrs. Yauger's verse may be divided into three classifications; namely, poems depicting character or human nature, poems of nature and miscellaneous poems. Of these, the poet seems definitely at her best in her character studies. The first three poems in her volume concern the poet's family.
"I Remember," which is Mrs. Yauger's favorite, is a study of the poet's father, who was a man's man, one who enjoyed outdoor life and adventure. She writes:

My father rode a horse
   And carried a gun;
He swapped for a living
   And fought for his fun-
I remember his spurs--
   A-gleam in the sun.

My father was always
   Going somewhere--
To rodeo, market,
   Or Cattleman's fair--
I remember my mother,
   Her hand in the air.6

The last two lines characterize her mother, whom she remembers as always waving good-bye to her father. J. Frank Dobie quoted this poem in a recent article which he wrote on Mother's Day.7 "She Loved A Roof" is another characterization of her mother and father. The mother loved a home as something to keep and hand down to her children, but the father loved the sky and far off places. The mother, although she had always gone with him, "weeps at the sight of each road-side shack." "Heritage," another characterization of the poet's mother and father, tells of the traits which the poet has inherited from each. Her father was big and quick in love and hate—a man of sudden passion. Her mother was small, cool and serious, or somber eyed. He craved

6 Fay M. Yauger, Planter's Charm, p. 15. All poems referred to in this study are found in Planter's Charm.
7 Correspondence with Mrs. Yauger, June, 1942.
adventure, and she craved a home. The daughter inherited her father's quick passion, but she is small in stature and rather serious, as her mother was. Being a combination of both natures, this daughter craves adventure, but she wants her home also.

"One Woman To Another" is an original poem, written in dialogue, which pictures a young girl on her way to her wedding. She meets an old worn-out woman whose life has been very hard. One learns from the questions that the bride asks and the old woman answers that they had started their married life in much the same manner; their husbands were very similar. When the young bride asks the old woman for her blessing, she replies:

Who am I to warn you,  
Lady, pretty lady,  
And as for my blessing,  
I give it from my heart.  
Ain't no thing to wish you  
More than what you're facin'—  
Go, and for good luck I'll cross  
Your wheel-dust when you start.

In a rather unusual and original manner, the poet tells the story, in "The Stranger," of a husband who has no idea of his wife's inner nature. In "Three Women" the poet describes three different women who watch the sun go down. There is a young girl who talks about the man she is going to marry. A young woman speaks of the child she is going to bear. The

*Fauger, Planter's Charm, p. 21.*
third person, an old woman, looks at the darkening day and says nothing.

Filled with pathos and a grim humor is "Draft Girl's Choice." The young lady in this picture might have married either of two men who could have provided well for her. But instead she married a good-for-nothing man who made the others look dull. The poet asks in closing:

And who was I to choose good gold
Or shelter for my head
When I could starve, and tramp the roads,
And break my heart instead? 9

"Sisters" is a rather hard picture of two sisters, the younger of whom had lost her husband. When the spinster sister tried to comfort her younger sister, she was reproved because she had never loved and could not know what the widowed sister was suffering. Then the spinster sister told the story of her own life -- a story she had not told before -- that she had loved and her love had not been requited. Because of this experience she had known grief. The first sister claimed her memories, the second claimed her dreams.

"County Fair" the poem which won the National contest award conducted by the Kaleidograph Magazine, is a rather humorous yet pathetic rendition of the story of a country boy who goes to the county fair. The first thing of interest which catches his eye is a painted dancing girl, with

9 Ibid., p. 24.
whom he immediately falls in love. But the girl scorns his love, snaps her finger-tips under his nose and says, "I think the hicks have come to clutter up our dance." Broken-hearted, and without further interest in the fair, the lad goes home, but his heart is still miles away "at Teague, the county seat."

"Sheepherder," one of Mrs. Yauger's best poems, tells the story of a man who had long been a herder of sheep. After he had changed his occupation for farming, even though he had become a successful farmer, he longed for his old duties as a sheepherder. When herds of sheep went by, he sniffed "the dusty sheep smell in the grass," and

when strays bleat at night from some hill-shelf
I hate my plow, by God,—and hate myself.10

"Prospector's Wife," another interesting characterization, tells the story of a prospector who has turned farmer. The wife knows that as soon as he hears that gold has been discovered, anywhere, he will leave his fields and team. Nothing she can say or do will deter him from this adventurous life. "Blind Poet" describes a poet who sang so beautifully that men and women stopped their duties or chores to listen; he lifted their cares and brought comfort to aching hearts, for

Blind Raftery rode here and there
And never tarried long,

10Ibid., p. 47.
Yet where he passed he left behind
The wonder of his song.

Having received first prize in a national contest sponsored by The Poetry Society of America, the poem, "Planter's Charm," is without doubt, the best in the grouping of character studies. Many critics have recognized the ability of Mrs. Yauger through this poem. Because of its form and content, "Planter's Charm" has been used again and again in dramatic work. Earl C. Bryan, Director of the Speech Department, Texas State College for Women has said of this poem, "'Planter's Charm' is one of the strongest ballads that I have found in many a year." Realistic as are most of her poems, this ballad is a symbolic, vigorous, and well wrought description of the fulfillment of the old adage

One for the buzzard
One for the crow--
One to rot--and--
One to grow.

Nan, the widow, repeated these words to herself as she went up and down the rows planting the kernels of corn. She had dreamed of a kinder fate before "Tim Slade drew rein outside her door." Nan's husband, who had died with a bullet hole through his head, was the "one for the buzzard." The elder son, who had disappeared with a price on his head, was the "one for the crow." Nan, herself, because she had

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11Ibid., p. 66.

12Earl C. Bryan, in the frontispiece to Planter's Charm.
disintegrated from the girl she had been before she married, was the "one to rot." But of the younger son, the "one to grow," who was the one hope of Nan's life, the poet writes,

As if in answer, over the ditch
A child comes riding a willow switch.

Her second-born, of whom no one
Could say in truth, "His father's son."

For his chin is firm, and his mouth is grave
And the look in his eye is bright and brave.

And she, remembering farm-hand talk
"You lose three seeds to get one stalk,"

Stands tall and proud and her pale cheeks glow
As she drops a kernel: "One to grow!"

Mrs. Yauger's nature poems are so realistic that the reader is convinced the poet has an intimate knowledge of her material. Using the language of the people about whom she writes, again and again she leads one to the scene, but she draws no conclusions, nor does she moralize. When she writes of "Wind Clouds," the woman in the picture "was grubbing in the yard," digging sand burrs "when she straightened and saw a bank in the north." The poet continues:

She saw her man
Unhitch in the field;
At noon he had said,
"A middling yield

And the farm is ours."
Now she saw his grim
Hard look as she opened
The gate for him.

13Yauger, Planter's Charm, p. 36, 37.

14Ibid., pp. 36, 39.
Another picture of frustration is shown in "Blizzard." Here the rhythm is uneven, but the words fit the sense or meaning which the poet is trying to convey. This poem is so starkly realistic that it makes one shudder to know that life does hold such disappointments as these. Mrs. Yauger has painted some vivid contrasts as she first tells of the woman suffering with "child-birth pains." She frantically gathers wood and fastens the gate against the turbulent gathering blizzard. Then

Rain at dusk and sleet with the dark--
Arms clawed raw and throat screamed dumb--
Pain like a knife turned round and round--
"Mother of God, will no one come?"

But morning came,

Calm with dawn, the rafters still;
The pale throat still, and the arms clawed raw:
Calm as the ice, hand-deep in the trough,
Still as the snow-drifts blocking the draw. 15

Although the rhythm is somewhat irregular, "Ditch Water" tells vividly and realistically what water, through irrigation, means to the farmer. Poems of this nature require plain language, an element which Mrs. Yauger understands. In writing of the farmer as he goes to turn the water into his ditch Mrs. Yauger says:

He likes to hear it gurgle,
spumed from the lead-gate's mouth,
Erimming his sandy furrows,
defying drouth.

15 Ibid., p. 43.
Bread in the farmer's kitchen
     gold in his heart and hand
Is brown ditch-water running
    onto his land.16

"Ditch Robber," another of the poems on irrigation problems, again reminds the reader that this poet knows her people and her nature by actual experience and contact. This poem, well written, with a good rhythm, tells the story of a man who stole ditch water when the crops were wilting. She merely states:

Bill robbed a ditch
    and Bill is dead,
for water's a roof
to the farmer's head;

Water's a mortgage
    paid in full,
a barbed-wire fence,
or a Hereford bull;

Water's a coat,
or a gold band ring:
to desert men
it is everything.17

"To Snake River, Dammed" is another poem concerning the importance of irrigation. Mrs. Yauger calls the great river a despoiler, a withholder, a wanton because it has withheld its waters from parched lands. Now she says it must mother ditches which have been constructed. These ditches, children of the great river, will be "proud with your blood in their bellies, to save the land." They will also "comfort deserts that you denied."

16 Ibid., p. 45.  
17 Ibid., p. 53.
In the group of miscellaneous poems, "Dead Love" and "After Death" offer nothing that is original. In the former poem, the poet is saying that even in death her love is beautiful. The latter poem contains the thought that after old love had died, the poet has made her heart tight against a new love, for she does not feel that it would be fitting to take a new love into a room haunted with memories.

Mrs. Yauger has wrought a delicate bit of imagery in "Old Memory," a poem well written and tuneful. In it she says that she remembers nothing of what has happened concerning an experience which had made her very unhappy. She does remember that she was unhappy and that it was about to rain. In closing she adds:

Of what was said I now recall
Neither end nor start.
I only know the scent of rain
Still stabs me in the heart. 18

Included in her volume are several poems in which the poet has used very descriptive or figurative language. "Summer-Noon" and "Winter-Night" are delicate sketches which show the contrast of the summer noon and winter night on the prairie. "Nostalgia" paints a picture of longing in very descriptive language. But "Abandoned Farm," the most figurative poem in the volume, bears repeating:

18 Ibid., p. 34.
The fields are dregs
in a hill-blue cup,
with the road a smoke thread
drifting up.

The old house huddles,
feet in the grass,
making room for a stream
to pass:

A stream that keeps
waverin back
for another look
at the road and shack,

And apple-trees
by the barbed-wire fence,
drooped in a heavy-limbed
suspense.  

"Moon-Struck" and "Curse," two interesting poems, are
well written tales. In the first a child with a "half-
bewildered, far off stare"

had got
her foolish ways
from sleeping under
full-moon rays.

In the latter a young bride had brought a curse upon the
community because she dared to pick a "thorn-branch to fasten
in her comb." All crops were ruined because "thorn-sap was
let in blossom time of year." "So Much May Happen," an
original theme in regular rhyme, might be called suggestive
realism. The poet is telling her readers of the change that
can take place in the life of a man in the course of a day.
She goes into no details but leaves them to the reader's

19 Ibid., p. 41.
20 Ibid., p. 62.
21 Ibid., p. 65.
imagination. She merely describes the man as he leaves home in the morning and as he returns at night.

As the closing poem in her volume, Mrs. Yauger offers "By Way of the Snake-Row Fence" to her readers. This poem is likely intended for a review of the poet's own life. The snake-row fence in its zig-zag way, is symbolic of the poet's life. The ring which she found at the first fence crook is the symbol of love. The book, found when she dropped her ring, is the symbol of wisdom; the poet resumed her education after her marriage. The pipe of reeds is the symbol of her love of poetry.

In the study of Mrs. Yauger's works, it is interesting to see the influence of the poet's varied and unusual life on her poetry. As she "trekked from farm to farm and place to place," she became a student of nature and of people. It is because of this early environment that she has been able to give to her poetry that native realism which so characterizes her works. It is true that there is little variation in her structure, that she used the narrative form in a majority of her works. Yet there are some good lyrics and several excellent ballads. In a simple, direct manner she has stated what she had to say in as few words as possible. These few words are invariably well chosen, however, and to the point. Her expressions are taken from every day language; her words are those which the farmers and ranchers...
of Texas actually use. Mrs. Yauger has not sung of the romance in the historical development of Texas; her poems deal with realities which often escape the more romantic writers. She has written of blizzards, wind storms, irrigation ditches, and people who have lived the hard way and who have suffered.

At times her poetry lacks rhythm, but her subjects are not conducive to set rhythmic patterns. Her language is often unpoetic, and somewhat flat, but she uses the language of the people about whom she writes. Her poems dealing with these people are her best. Next to these in importance are her nature poems. The miscellaneous group contains few poems of importance. Of these "So Much May Happen" is the most original and perhaps the best.

*Planter's Charm* contains within its pages poems of charm and fascination. But it is such gems as "I Remember," "One Woman to Another," "Wind Storm," "County Fair," and "Planter's Charm" that will prove Mrs. Yauger's contribution to the literature of Texas as well as to American literature in general.
CHAPTER VII

KAULLE WILSON BAKER

Because of the serious problems of self-protection and self-preservation, America developed slowly in a literary way. Texas, for the same reasons, was slow in developing any literary culture. During the last three or four decades, however, Texas writers have been ambitious to develop an authentic literature for their state. One of the greatest contributors toward this development has been Mrs. Karle Wilson Baker of Nacagdoches, Texas.

Although Mrs. Baker was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1878, she came to Texas when she was very young. Her father, a native of Georgia, and her mother, of pioneer Ohio stock, were both lovers of beauty. Because of a frail body, Karle Wilson's mother was not able to develop her own gift for writing. Her father, whom she describes as a stately, handsome man with snow white hair and beard, was a "visionary dreamer, a builder among the clouds. He was a business man by accident." 1

While Karle Wilson was a resident of Little Rock, she

attended the public schools there. After finishing the
Little Rock Academy in 1898, she studied English with Robert
Herrick, the novelist, and William Vaughan Moody, the poet,
at the University of Chicago.

Following this experience, Miss Wilson spent the fall
and winter of 1898-99 in Bristol, Virginia, where she taught
English and French in a school for girls. After a summer's
study in Chicago University, she returned to Bristol, where
she taught during the year 1899-1900. While teaching in
Bristol, Karle Wilson had as her friend and adviser the
teacher of English there. For years she sent him her poems
to criticize, until such time as she felt herself capable of
self-criticism and analysis.

From June 1900 to September 1901, Miss Wilson again
studied in Chicago University. Her course in daily theme
writing under Robert Herrick gave her training which has
been of great value to her.

About this time the Wilson family moved to Nacagdoches,
Texas. Mrs. Wilson's health required her daughter's care,
and Karle remained at home, where she devoted her major
effort to her invalid mother. Her spare time was spent in
writing; however, further education was pursued at Columbia
University and later at the University of Southern California.

After her marriage in 1907 to Thomas Ellis Baker of
Nacagdoches, the poet, whose first pen name was Charlotte
Wilson, began writing under the name Karle Wilson Baker.
After her marriage, a beauty spot near Nacagdoches, "Tanglewood," became her home. The birds of Tanglewood were of ever increasing interest to the poet, who began the study of birds as an avocation. Mrs. Baker says, "I have loved all out door things ever since I can remember. I am fond of all sorts of green growing things from trees to house-plants, and I have reared many sorts of moths and butterflies; I now have several families coming on. Most of them from eggs I found earlier in the spring. When one knows how, it is not much trouble to rear them, and I am never weary of watching their beautiful transformations." This love of nature, the understanding which the poet has enjoyed, is seen in her nature poems, in which field the poet is definitely at her best.

Mrs. Baker's two children, Thomas and Charlotte, have developed in her that deep affection and devotion which characterize her poems on childhood. They were the source of inspiration for Mrs. Baker's Garden of the Elynck, a book of fairy tales. Mrs. Baker proudly tells of her daughter's recent adventure, the publication of a novel, A Sombrero for Miss Brown. Charlotte has also had a book for young people of teen-age accepted for publication.

Mrs. Baker, who cannot remember when she began to write,

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2 Ibid., p. 526.
3 Correspondence with Mrs. Baker, August, 1941.
had as her first publication, a short poem, "The Poet," which appeared in *Harper's Magazine* for October, 1903. The poem follows:

Sayst thou the heart hath missed her harvestings—
A muffled harp, no hand to stir the rust?
Some note shall yet be struck from out the strings
That shall go singing when thy heart is dust.
Then soft, tread softly, clamorous heart bereft,
The lamentable chamber of thy years!
Fame brews her nectar from the sweet drops
In broken jars where love hath left stored his tears.

Since this first publication, the work of Mrs. Baker has appeared in many magazines, such as *The Yale Review*, *Scribner’s Magazine*, *The Century*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *The Sonnet*, *Smart Set*, *Little Review*, *Colonnade*, *Poetry Review of America*, *Texas Review*, and others.4

In 1919, Mrs. Baker’s first book, *Blue Smoke*, was published. In 1922, her second volume, *Burning Bush*, which she dedicated to her husband, was presented to the public. And in 1923, *Old Coins*, a book of short tales, allegories, and fables, was brought out. All three volumes were published by the Yale University Press.

In 1931 the Southwest Press presented to the public Mrs. Baker’s book of collected verse with the title of *Dreamers on Horseback*. This later volume included the poems in *Blue Smoke* and *Burning Bush*, both of which were out of publication.

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Mrs. Baker's versatile pen has proved successful in prose as well as verse. *Birds of Tanglewood* is a delightful picture of nature as the poet has come to know it on the grounds of her East Texas home. Like Thoreau, she has studied birds, without trap or gun. She has brought both pleasure and information to her readers because of this loving interest. Each of the four divisions of her book on birds holds a theme of distinct interest.

In her first novel, *Family Style*, published in 1937, Mrs. Baker gives her readers an interesting and authentic picture of the oil fields of East Texas. With the discovery of oil, almost overnight the entire countryside and its people were transformed. Some people became millionaires, while others lost their savings in craters made black with smoke. Mrs. Baker's novel deals with the changes which this upheaval wrought in the lives of the Priest family. Kathleen, wife of Duke Priest, reminds the reader of the idealized heroines found in Shakespeare's dramas, for she possesses all virtues, and no faults. After a terrific explosion followed by a devastating fire, Kathleen's grit and cleverness assert themselves; with the aid of a negro man, Kathleen opens a restaurant where she serves meals "family style." She saves her earnings and makes secure investments. Other characters in the Priest family are not portrayed so favorably, yet it is interesting to see what the author does with
her characters without moralizing. The book is good reading because of its authentic background of local color. The characters reflect the strain upon their spirits and capacities for the undertaking of responsibilities. Though somewhat artificial at times, the book is certainly worthy of merit.

Mrs. Baker has recently written and published an historical novel based on Texas history which is both informative and interesting. For the last four years she has been gathering material for this book, Star of the Wilderness, which spans the period from 1820 to 1835.

However, it is in the field of verse that Mrs. Baker excels, for she is primarily a poet. She is equally at ease with rhymed and free verse, although the latter predominates in her volumes. Mrs. Baker does not use a wide range of forms in her verse; there are no long poems, few narratives, and no drama to be found. For her the lyric verse is the chief medium of expression. Many of these lyrics are brief but compact sketches. Most of them possess a musical quality, a finesse, which shows the careful working of an artist. The reader will note this fact in the following lines, called "Morning Song":

There's a mellower light just over the hill,
And somewhere a yellower daffodil,
And honey, somewhere, that's sweeter still.
And some were meant to stay like a stone,
Knowing the things they have always known,
Sinking down deeper into their own.\(^5\)

The couplet form, which the poet frequently uses with care, is found in the short lyric "I Weight My Mind." It follows in part:

I weight my mind as best I can to keep it close to earth
With chunky little platitudes and bits of twisted mirth;
As well detain a puff of smoke, or cob-web bind a bird!
Answering to a sudden call some inner ear has heard.\(^6\)

In the sonnet Mrs. Baker employs the old Italian form entirely. Among her sonnets, "The Young Envoy" is perhaps her best.

The delicate, colorful style of Mrs. Baker's poetry is one of its outstanding characteristics. She is a master in the use of dainty, delicate language. Few poems in all the realm of literature possess more of those qualities than the following lines from "The Spring Moon."

A-dream you walk in your soft blue meadows,
With a chance-plucked flower in your spun gold hair,
And a cloud-scarf trailing of silver veiling,
And a star-child stumbling beside you there!\(^7\)

Indeed, Mrs. Baker seems to have searched the English language for its dainty, fragile words, which she uses extensively throughout her works. Color, too, receives a great deal of attention from Mrs. Baker. She employs it to paint pictures, as she does in the following lines from "Grey."

\(^5\) Karle Wilson Baker, Dreamers on Horseback, p. 76. All poems referred to in this analysis are from this volume.

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 84.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 22.
Up among the grey clouds
Through the grey rain,
The wild ducks are trailing
Their wavering chain.

Or she uses it to express a mood, as in "Days":

Some days are just cocoons—all cold,
and dull, and blind,
They hang from drooping branches in
the grey woods of my mind.

And other days they drift and shine—
such free and flying things!
I find the gold-dust in my hair,
left by their brushing wings.

Sometimes she uses color to express feeling as she does in
"Bluebird and Cardinal."

And lo, among the leafy hidden groves
Within my heart, they both do flit and nest,
Saintly blue wings and vaunting scarlet crest.

In spite of the extensive use of delicate words and
color, the dominant feature of Mrs. Baker's style is her
figurative language. Her poetry abounds in metaphors, simi-
les, personification, alliteration, and apostrophes. Most
of the time her figures of speech are quite apt and add to
the charm and meaning of her poetry, but there are times
when they are over-done and far fetched. In "Such Were the
Saints," she calls the saints "Gadflies of God." In "Beauty's
Hands Are Cool," she says

Beauty's hands are cool
As a crab-apple spray.
These figures of speech, and a few more of the same character, repel the sensitive reader. He feels that the poet has strained for effect, and the results are grating. However, it is seldom that so discriminating a poet as Mrs. Baker allows her imagination to run riot. Usually her colorful imagination is tempered by her fine poetic distinction to produce such lines as these from "Song to the Beat of Wings":

Peace is a white bird,  
And beauty is a castled cloud,  
And love is a fierce fire that loves to be made kind;

And I have climbed the castled cloud,  
And I have caged the fierce fire,  
But the white bird, the white bird--her I cannot bind!\(^1\)

Nature, in all of its aspects, is a constant source of inspiration to this poet. How fortunate for her readers that her stage was set in so perfect a background as is found in the East Texas woods! Here the trees, the birds, the moon, and the stars became her companions, for she knew them intimately. It is not surprising then, that the poet's best verse is found in her poems of nature. In one of her early poems, "Daily Bread," the poet says that her heart is made happy by the out-of-doors. Her soul seeks manna from the beauty of trees, her drink is the sky. She receives a divine inspiration, for

God Himself brings me green wine  
in a cup of silver  
And holds it for me while I drink.\(^2\)

\(^{12}\text{Ibid.}, p. 81. \quad ^{13}\text{Ibid.}, p. 4.\)
In "Orders" the poet speaks of nature as the ancient mother who counsels her children in different ways. "To one she says, Keep busy! To one she says, Keep still!" But to the poet she says, "Wait and listen" until you are sure that you have something to give. "Burning Bush" demonstrates how the very smallest of nature's handiwork can inspire the poet. In "Earth-Questions" the poet is asking why nature opens a hidden door to her and sets her struggling spirit free, when her spirit grieves.

So great is the poet's love for trees that in one poem she compares her life to a tree, a sturdy tree, deep-rooted in the earth. The wild bird singing in the branches is a symbol of her artistic soul. This poem, "The Tree," expresses the poet's oneness with nature. In "Winter Secrets" the poet expresses the belief that God speaks to her through nature. He uses the branches of the naked trees as characters with which He writes His letters against the winter sky. The writer studies nature as a scholar would his parchment, in order to understand God's meaning. After a careful survey of the poems on trees, the reader concludes that the pine tree is the poet's favorite. In "Tree Talk" the pines, like nearest friends, often leave her hungry with a kiss. Again, as the poet watched the "Pine in the Rain" she felt a desire to write a poem as tall and as straight as the pine tree itself. She believes she could if she were as "sure and simple and quiet as a tree." In "Elopement" she speaks of the pine
as a man tree, and the cedar as a lady tree. Tall hickory trees are compared to four kings or gods in "The Four Kings." The poet writes that as she nears these trees she feels that she is walking on holy ground. In "Temperate Tribute" the poet calls the sycamore tree a minor poet, who is not much good in a practical world. In "Elm Lace" the poet marvels at the wisdom of the elm tree as with a "dawn-like grace," it covers a "million dark twigged memories" each spring with "clouds of lace, delicate as a bride's."

Another favorite subject of Mrs. Baker's, a subject which she treats in both prose and poetry, is the birds which she has known in Tanglewood. "A Flock of Birds" tells of the personalities of six different birds. A blue bird, according to the poet, is "like a butterfly whispering secrets to a pear blossom." Men like doves "for their gentle, still grey manners--they are never ruffled, like women." The poet whimsically describes the wren. She says:

The wren's mind is in her tail,
But it is a charming tail,
And a brisk and whirring mind. 14

The wood-thrush knows "why we came here, and why we shouldn't mind dying." Mrs. Baker closes her bird study with a flash of color in which she says:

The red bird is the core of fire at the heart of my still living;
And his little lady is the soft ashes covering the half-seen embers. 15

14 Ibid., p. 106. 15 Ibid., p. 108.
The poet uses very beautiful and colorful language in speaking of the moon, the stars, and the clouds. Perhaps one of the most soothing and restful of Mrs. Baker's poems on nature is found in the poet's estimate of her own life and work, where she says:

I shall be loved as quiet things  
Are loved--white pigeons in the sun,  
Curled yellow leaves that whisper down  
One after one.

The silver reticence of smoke  
That tells no secret of its birth  
Among the fiery agonies  
That turn the earth.  

Because of Mrs. Baker's deep-rooted love of nature, her philosophy and her religion both reflect its influence. She believes not only in her oneness with nature, but in God's oneness with nature. At times her writings remind one of Emerson in their theme that all the universe is somehow connected, and that nature holds the key to the secret. "The Young Envoy" and "Lord of the Trees" both express this idea, and it recurs again and again throughout her writings. However, in "The Young Envoy," which follows, this thought is most vividly expressed.

They sent me, but I must have lost my way--  
The voices yonder--and they bade me come,  
Else I had fain stayed with the rest at home;  
And they said "Speak!" but try as still I may  
I have forgotten what they bade me say.  
Ah, but 'twas noble! By it, eloquent Rome  
Seemed but a noise of tumult; and mere foam  
Of sunny seas was Athens' little day.

16 Ibid., p. 91.
What was the word They gave me? Now and then
The thrushes start to sing it, and the breeze
Loitering by my ear when spring's at hand
Says a soft word in passing; then again
Goes murmuring off, high up among the trees,
Is gone, and I--I did not understand.17

So much of the inspiration for Mrs. Baker's religion
comes from nature that one wonders if she could be orthodox
in her beliefs. In "Creeds" she says:

Friend, you are grieved that I shall go
Unhoused, unsheltered, gaunt and free,
My cloak for armor--for my tent
The roadside tree;

And I--I know not how you bear
A roof betwixt you and the blue;
Brother, the creed would stifle me
That shelters you.

Yet the same light that floods at dawn
Your cloistered room, your criptic stairs,
Wakes me, too--sleeping by the hedge--
To morning prayers.18

Again in "Dogmatic," she says no one who loves and under-
stands nature can be agnostic. In spite of this seemingly
deep religion inspired by nature, there are times when the
poet questions the greatest tenet of all religions--immor-
tality. There is a feeling of restlessness and doubt in a
number of her poems. In "Wisdom" she asks why one should
strive all his life to get wisdom when it ends in the church-
yard or goes "with the spirit--if it goes." Few poems show
greater doubt and pessimism than the following lines from
"Veiled Moonlight":

17 Ibid., p. 30. 18 Ibid., p. 42.
And none can say the world was ever young,
And none can prove the dream of youth was right!
O thou, my lost illusion! O thou Doubt,
With subtle eyes and pale destroying hands!
Thou walkest with me, hedging me about
With sad philosophies from wise old lands.19

However, those moments of doubt are infrequent. Usually, the poet can answer them as she has in the poem "To One Who Smiles At My Simplicity," in which she states her belief in immortality and says that even if she is wrong, she will continue to live her life in the same way. The fact that she does not fear death is further proof of her faith. In "A Child's Game" and "Bed-Time," she expresses a curiosity and a desire to leave the darkness of this world for the light of the next.

Another belief of Mrs. Baker's is that joy and pain are inseparably interwoven; there cannot be one without the other. Joy is the fruit of pain. The following poem, "Root and Flower," expresses this idea.

Pain is the rich, dark loam
Where my roots thrust and grope,
Breaking their stubborn food
Fighting for scope;

But up in the delicate air
That wraps leaf and bark
Joy, like a foam of flowers,
Bursts from the dark.20

Again in "Recipes" Mrs. Baker says:

19 Ibid., p. 33.
20 Ibid., p. 126.
What will make a man sing?
Three small words and brief
Serve to tell of that thing:
Joy--and lovely grief.\textsuperscript{21}

Mrs. Baker believes that one cannot know the true meaning, the deeper meaning, of joy without having experienced sorrow.

There is a certain strength and courage in Mrs. Baker's outlook on life which is evidenced in her poetry. She is calm and unafraid; there is nothing craven in her attitude toward any of life's problems. In her short poem "Courage," she has given her recipe for her peace of mind.

\begin{quote}
Courage is armor
A blind man wears;
The calloused scar
Of outlived despairs:
Courage is Fear
That has said its prayers.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Even the characteristic fear of all women, that of growing old, has left Mrs. Baker untouched. In her poem "Let Me Grow Lovely," she has painted a beautiful picture of approaching age. She says,

\begin{quote}
Let me grow lovely, growing old--
So many fine things do:
Laces, and ivory, and gold,
And silks need not be new,

And there is healing in old trees,
Old streets a glamour hold:
Why may not I, as well as they,
Grow lovely, growing old?\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Nor does death hold any fear for Mrs. Baker. This great

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 149.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 115.
\item \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 194.
\end{itemize}
experience she anticipates with the same calm, serene attitude. The first verse of "A Child's Game" expresses her supreme faith in both life and death.

Nor sleep, nor journey, nor affray
Can justly image death to me;
I am a little child, and Death
The one who lets you go and see. 24

The poet has further expressed her philosophy and her love of nature in a group of sonnets. In "Rondel for September" the poet uses the falling-leaf as a symbol of waning summer. The falling-leaf is compared to the "Summer's gypsy feet." Following the death of William Vaughn Moody, the poet, who had been an early teacher and inspirer of Mrs. Baker, she wrote a sonnet called "W.V.M.--1910." In this sonnet she says that at first she was rather bitter because of the passing of Moody, but later she came to understand the person himself better. She writes:

Grief is the treasure of his own; but I
Who only touched his garment's hem, draw near
And find in him increasingly my part,
Fall into step, bespeak his company!
Living, the nearest claim them; but the dear
Great dead belong to any humble heart. 25

From the standpoint of form and thought content, "The Young Envoy" is Mrs. Baker's best sonnet; it tells of her belief that she was designated to be nature's interpreter to man. 26 "To My Enemy" is rather original in thought content; in this sonnet the poet expresses her unwilling submission to time,

24 Ibid., p. 29. 25 Ibid., p. 29. 26 This sonnet is quoted on page 126 above.
her enemy. When she was young she had no care for time,--

but yesterday
I lifted thy huge gauntlet where it lay
And flung it back with laughter. Now I know
Too well the grievous weight; it hath laid low
Youth's certitude at last."

In spite of this feeling, the poet says "I bow my neck; my
soul I will not bow."

Mrs. Baker has written several interesting poems which
might be classified as character studies. Perhaps the best
of these is "The Family." One notes a whimsical humor as
the poet tells of an experience in church when she watched
the preacher's wife and son. The mother, "a kind, broad-
bosomed woman," understood the restlessness of her son, still
in knee trousers, but already well above his mother's shoul-
der. The mother was content to let her son lean his head on
her "cushioned arm" and yawn as he watched his father while
he "preached and preached with solemn words." "At the
Picture Show" is a realistic picture of a family of four,
the father, mother, and two children, as they sit watching
the show. The reactions of each, especially those of the
mother, are interestingly portrayed. "From the Pullman"
tells of the "faces of women in lonely shanties" which haunt
the poet long after her train has passed them by. A short
study in free verse, "The Dressmaker," depicts a seamstress
who is an artist in her timid way. In "Vanity" Mrs. Baker

27Baker, Dreamers on Horseback, p. 36.
tells why ladies dress themselves "in silky sheens and pea-
cock dyes." She states that it is an effort to hush their souls that "are hungry to be great." "Grandfather" is an excellently written study in free verse. The grandfather, in his spring-wagon propelled by a smart bay team, was taking the granddaughter for a visit to the little mortgaged farm. In spite of his seventy-one years and his patched clothes, he was still unafraid and optimistic. When she asked how her grandmother was, the old gentleman replied with a flash of spirit, "She's so darned pessimistic!"

Included in her first volume of verse are several interesting poems which Mrs. Baker has written with childhood as the theme and inspiration. The first, called "Mother-Song," is the cry of a mother before her child is born. She prays that if her life be taken, God will shield and protect her little one. In "Possessions" the poet is writing about her little son who gathers possessions all day long, "a spool, a bug, a piece of string, a shoe horn." Then at night he goes to his mother, leaving his possessions. The poet compares this tendency to that of adult man, who, when he is gathered to his Father, leaves his earthly possessions behind. In "Reprieve" the poet-mother hopes that she will prove worthy of her small child's memories of her. "Apple and Rose," a delicate little poem, also very figurative, compares the poet's daughter to a tea rose, which she says is "satin to the touch" and "wine to the lips." Her son, Thomas, "is a
June apple, firm and cool"; he is "scornful of too much sweetness." the poet pleads with the evil things of life to pass by her tea-rose and her June apple. In "A Little Boy's Bath" the poet says very naturally,

You would have thought he never would come clean,
Yet here he is, shining like a sea-shell.28

The mother has striven to keep her son's body clean, and she prays that life will keep his soul clean. The poet loves stillness and likes to creep off into the quiet where her mind can be clear for thinking. At times she longs to get away from her children "as they come whooping and splashing," and break in upon her thought. Then she adds, "But then--the little feet themselves are so sweet!" "Beach-Play," another figurative little poem, gives some very apt comparisons. The poet says her son will be the sea and she must be the shore. She adds:

O Youth, the unappeasable
That can but break and break!
I think I shall be very wise
For Youth's remembered sake.29

Mrs. Baker's first historical poem of note, entitled "Unser Gott," was written in 1914. The poet is concerned with the fact that we should make our God large enough to encompass all people. In 1918 the poet wrote "Eagle Youth," glorifying the aviator, the boy who could not stand to "burrow and hide with a million, side by side." She says

28 Ibid., p. 47.  29 Ibid., p. 49.
this youth has found a way in which he can be free of that "dun immensity," that he prefers to "climb up into the sky," where the whole world can watch him die.

Dreamers on horseback were the men who made Texas, men who needed room. Mrs. Baker sings of these men and women in the first poem in the section of her book devoted to Texas history. This poem, "Song of the Forerunners," pictures the people who built Texas. They were strong men and brave women who "laughed at fate and doom." The job, however, was too much for them and had to be left for their descendants to complete. "Within the Alamo," another historical poem, is based on the legend, believed by most Texans, that Travis drew a straight line across the dirt floor of the Alamo and asked the men who wished to remain and fight the Mexicans to cross the line and asked the others to leave. This poem has a jagged, irregular rhythm which does not fit its subject; it sounds more like the work of an amateur than any other poem this poet has written.

Mrs. Baker's picture of the Texas cowboy is a fanciful rather than a realistic one. She says, in "Texas Cowboy":

He is a thought; he is not flesh-and-bone.
He is immortal youth astride a dream;
The hungry flame that eats to ash and stone
The gorgeous fruitage of the things that seem.

The poet believes that even though his day is gone, the cowboy still lives in the heart of people.

30 Ibid., p. 146.
In "Some Towns of Texas" the poet describes five cities of importance in Texas, giving a bit of early history of each. The first sonnet tells of San Antonio, the town from which she "brought away a thousand hours' delight." The second picture deals with the early history of Nacogdoches, where the Spaniards settled in an early day. Of Austin the poet says, "she leans upon her violet hills at ease." The citizens of Austin have brought back treasures of the old world and have placed them where once the prairie schooner lay; in this way, they have somewhat grafted their culture. Dallas has developed into a city of power, but in spite of power, beauty, too, has been cultivated. Although Houston is wealthy, the city still remembers in her heart the romance of the earlier days, the moonlit balconies, and magnolia blooms.

Mrs. Baker's historical poems in no way measure up to her nature poems. Writing of the deeds of men and nations is out of Mrs. Baker's line. Her rhythms do not fit her subjects anymore than do her fanciful, figurative treatment of such subjects. With the exception of "Song of the Forerunners," these poems are quite mediocre.

The last group of poems to be discussed may be termed miscellaneous. The poet tells her readers in "Labels" that her poems will be hard to classify; she adds:

I think I will be going--
A creature that sings
Can't wait for the labels
To stick to her wings.31

In "Fleets of My Fancy" the poet compares her fancies to boats that are stirred by the winds of fate. In "Color" the poet says that we "belong to the blue serge world," because we have grown so practical that we refuse to wear bright colors and smile disdainfully at those who do. But "beauty outwits us," and we see and admire color in the most unexpected places. "Kites" is an imaginative poem in which the poet compares her hopes to kites, which she "used to send up on windy days"; she expects to find all her hopes again some day "among the trees of paradise." In "My Heirs" the poet says she will leave her "crumb of singing," her "legacy of air" to those who are capable of appreciating her gift, those "who live on manna." But to others who do not understand she will be thought a "pauper who didn't leave a thing."

"Half-Way Stone" was probably written on the poet's fiftieth birthday. In this poem, she sums up her life and her accomplishments. She writes:

I have not much to show for all
The dedicated years;
A little tree of ecstasy
A little jar of tears.

I shall not leave a noisy name,
But there'll be two or three
Who'll want me, not for oracle,
But just for company.32

In summarizing the works of Mrs. Baker, one clearly sees

31 Ibid., p. 136.  
32 Ibid., p. 152.
that the field in which she excels is nature poetry. Her home, nestled in the pines of East Texas, made it possible for her to have as her companions the trees, the birds, the moon, and the stars. Her poetry reflects the joys which the poet finds in the simple things of nature. Her soul is made happy by the out-of-doors. Frequently she writes of learning more of God through nature. She feels that she has been called as a messenger or an interpreter of nature to man. Her poetry is filled with beauty, truth, and courage. She does not moralize, yet her readers feel that she has within her lines the power to lift one higher. The poet compares her own life to a tree, sturdy, deep-rooted in the earth. The reader finds a confidence, or self-assurance, in the poet's work, which has no approach to boastfulness.

Mrs. Baker's love of nature has influenced her philosophy and her religion. She believes not only in her oneness with nature, but in God's oneness with nature. The belief that joy and pain are inseparably interwoven, that joy is the fruit of pain, is a frequent theme of her poems. She believes that one who has not experienced sorrow cannot know the true meaning of joy. Mrs. Baker's poetry reveals a certain strength and courage in the poet's outlook on life. Neither life, nor death, nor anything beyond makes her afraid.

Mrs. Baker's sonnets, most of which are well done, are the result of careful study and artistry. She is consistent in the use of the old Italian form, which is a fit medium of
expression for the subjects on which she writes. In view of the fact that she has written very few narratives, no long poems, and no drama, Mrs. Baker is known as a lyricist. Although her style is delicate and colorful, its most important characteristic is its figurative language. Her poetry abounds in metaphors and other figures, which add charm through their aptness.

Mrs. Baker's character studies, her poems on childhood, and her historical poems are interesting, but it is through her nature poetry that this poet's fame will live and grow.

With the analysis of Mrs. Baker's poems, my study is concluded. The first four poets studied, Lexie Dean Robertson, Margaret Bell Houston, Berta Hart Nance and Vaida Stewart Montgomery, were born in the state of Texas of pioneer stock. Mrs. Robertson's best poems are those which deal with the natives, their conditions, and their occupations. Margaret Bell Houston, granddaughter of General Sam Houston has written her best poem, "Song of the Traffic," as a picture of contrast between Manhattan New York and her native state. Always there is that nostalgia for her home, Texas. Berta Hart Nance in her poems "Cattle" and "Texan" has written authentically of Texas history. Vaida Stewart Montgomery has written of locoed cattle and stampedes in a most realistic manner, giving a true picture of conditions in this state.
The last three poets whom I have studied, Grace Noll Crowell, Fay M. Yauger, and Karle Wilson Baker, although they were not native born Texans, have, nevertheless, written of her prairies, her sunsets, her people, and her homes. They love the land of the South and have glorified it.

I have not claimed for these people that their fame will grow through the ages. I have not tried to show that they have done anything particularly new or different. But as a native-born Texan who is proud of her state and its culture, I have tried to show that these seven women, through their lives and through their poetry, have made a definite contribution to the literary development of our state. And since our state is a part of our great union, I feel that their influence will be felt beyond the bounds of Texas. The future of these poets is, of course, unpredictable; time alone will be able to tell. It is my opinion, however, that several of these poets will live in the hearts of Texans for many generations.
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