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## Wandersoul of the South: Situating 20th century Alabama poet Clement Wood in a literary tradition

Skye Rozario  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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WANDERSOUL OF THE SOUTH:  
SITUATING 20TH CENTURY ALABAMA POET CLEMENT WOOD  
IN A LITERARY TRADITION

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

Skye Rozario  
University of Northern Iowa  
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This Study by: Skye Rozario

Entitled: WANDERSOUL OF THE SOUTH: SITUATING 20TH CENTURY ALABAMA POET CLEMENT WOOD IN A LITERARY TRADITION

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University Honors with Distinction or University Honors (select appropriate designation)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Dr. Jeremy Schraffenberger, Honors Thesis Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

## **Abstract**

The following is a literary study on 20<sup>th</sup> century Alabama poet Clement Wood. As a writer, Wood lived and worked mainly in Alabama and New York, and was greatly involved and connected to the literary movements Modernism, the Southern Renaissance, and American Romanticism. He published many poems, short stories, and criticism in a variety of literary magazines, wrote his own columns, and edited journals as well. Though Wood was heavily involved in this community, his work is under-researched on the whole. Wood's poetry attests to his mastery of rhyme and form and mainly focuses on the value of nature in relation to our human lives. Because of Wood's many involvements and literary views, it is difficult to align him to a particular literary movement. As such, the purpose of my research is to situate Wood in a literary tradition by analyzing the main literary movements that influenced him or were active during this era. In doing so, I explore how Wood develops three major thematic areas in his poetry, the natural, the social, and the spiritual. I then juxtapose Wood's treatment of these areas with how specific Modernist and Southern Renaissance authors address each area in order to determine how Wood fits into the 20<sup>th</sup> century American literary world.

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## **I. “Let me will life, and its freshening hearty struggles”**

Clement Richardson Wood was an American poet who lived and worked mainly in Alabama and New York in the early-to mid-twentieth century. On the whole, he is an under-researched and relatively unknown literary figure, which means there is little scholarship on him and his work. Thus, in order to even begin addressing what literary movement Wood fits into, if any, I must first detail who exactly Wood was. As the main goal of my research is to situate Wood in a literary tradition by comparing him to the main literary movements active during his life, namely, Modernism and the Southern Renaissance, it is first important to establish Wood's biographical life circumstances, as an unknown, yet prolific writer in the American south.

Wood was born in 1888, during the tail end of English and American Romanticism, and subsequently lived through several major American literary movements, including, most notably, Modernism and the Southern Renaissance. But aside from turbulence in the literary realm, Wood lived through several major world events that pushed America in a new direction, both socially and politically. He lived through World War I in the early 1900s, the Great Depression in the 30s, and World War II in the 40s. And, as print media gradually became the main medium of information, he became heavily involved in the literary magazine scene.

Wood, originally following the footsteps of his father, Sterling Alexander Wood, as a lawyer, gave up the judicial lifestyle to pursue literature in the early 1920s. He began in New York with the socialist movement, and created long-lasting ties with Louis Untermeyer, Edwin Markham, and James Oppenheim, whom he maintained relationships with even after turning away from socialist ideology. These personal connections in turn influenced the development of his poetic philosophy as he wrote against segregation, the injustice of mine-workers, and the dangers of industrial progress to man and nature.

In terms of family, Clement Wood had a somewhat strained relationship with this father, and an almost too-affectionate one with his mother, which he admits to in his autobiography, *The Glory Road*, and which will factor in my analysis further on. Both of these unique relationships contributed to his critical attitude toward traditional Southern values as embodied in his father's way of life, as well as his great emphasis on loving fully and deeply whomever he would. He almost never mentions his siblings, though he had several. He had a profound and deep respect for his grandfather and aunt, Warfield Creath Richardson and Belle Richardson Harrison, who were also writers. Richardson was a lesser-known poet of the Romantic Era, who first introduced Wood to that particular style of poetry. He passed away in Wood's youth, which further drew Wood closer to the literary realm, and in a way led him to continue Richardson's work in his own life.

Born and raised in Birmingham, Alabama, from his childhood Wood had a keen and deep relationship with the natural world and Red Mountain, which was located right next to their home. This intensely present contrast between the wild majesty of nature and the "grimy glory" of Birmingham and other cities affected his understanding of the natural world and its relation to humanity (Wood, *Glory Road* 52). As Wood moved back and forth from city to country, he experienced this stark difference frequently and fully, such that it became a major theme in his poetic work.

Later in his life, Wood became majorly involved in several literary magazines and published his own poetry as well as wrote critiques and reviews of other writers. These included mainly *The Bookman*, *The Nation*, and *The Seven Arts*. Along with those, he worked extensively with Emanuel Julius-Haldemann and his series of *Little Blue Books*. Wood wrote fifty-two of

these books on a variety of topics, both literary and non-literary (“Resources for Collectors: Author Profile of Clement Wood.”).

On the whole, Wood was extremely active in the twentieth-century literary scene in America. His work was published side by side with notable writers such as Robert Frost, Theodore Dreiser, and Amy Lowell. He reviewed books by important writers like Carl Sandburg, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and others; and he was likewise reviewed in *The New York Evening Post* and *The Saturday Review of Literature*. His work received both harsh criticism and genuine praise, as with his *Eagle Sonnets* which were said by A.M. Sullivan in his review to be “widely acclaimed” (19), but some of his earlier poetry was also said to be at times “‘gagged’ and cheap” (Becker, 505).

On the flipside, Clement Wood was as equally unsparing in his own criticism; he was picky and precise in his likes and dislikes of literary styles and was quick to say so. He criticized many Modernist poets and writers; his admiration for Whitman, Oppenheim, and Untermeyer was clear, but he expressed mixed feelings about Frost, Eliot, and Pound. This fiery personality is perhaps what led Edwin Markham to label Wood as “The stormy petrel of American poetry,” as Wood references in his autobiography (*The Glory Road*, 14).

In line with Wood’s ‘stormy’ nature, characteristic of his poetry is equally fresh and robust meter, precise and unique rhyme, and personification. He writes on topics from pining after an unrequited love to allegorical retellings of myths like Narcissus to communing with the natural world. He even invented a poem form, the Canopus, after his poem of the same name<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Wood’s poem, *Canopus*, was first published in *The Nation*, June 22, 1921. Though ‘Canopus’ was also the title, it came to refer as well to the form of the poem. In short, a ‘canopus’ is a narrative poem centered on the topic of love and consists of a varying number of septets composed in iambic hexameter following an ABABCBC rhyme scheme. Wood notes in his *Poet’s Handbook* how it was “hailed by Gamaliel Bradford as the best rhyming stanza for narrative verse ever invented” (287).



As such, several main themes are consistent throughout Wood's poetry that stem from these topics. The major themes in Wood's poetic work fit into three broad categories: the natural, the social, and the spiritual, all of which have multiple facets and intricacies.

In order to determine Clement Wood's fit, or lack thereof, into one of the literary movements during the 20th century, I will juxtapose how Wood treats these three central thematic areas, natural, social, and spiritual, in his own work, with how his major contemporary influences, Modernism (with an emphasis on Realism) and the Southern Renaissance portray the same themes. By understanding the differences and similarities between Wood's themes and style and that of Modernism and the Southern Renaissance, I will be able to determine how closely he aligns with each, and then can assign him a place in the 20th century American literary world.

## **II. "They range from fair verse to moronic bilge"**

Because Clement Wood is as an under-researched writer, little critical scholarship about him exists. As such, many of my secondary sources consist of brief magazine articles, magazine reviews, and correspondence pertaining to his work. Clement Wood himself was a prolific writer and published numerous books on a variety of subjects, both fiction and nonfiction. This means that his primary works are of vital importance to my study, as I will be using his specific poems and poetics to place him within a literary tradition. As far as primary sources go, I use his autobiography *The Glory Road* (1936) and poetry collections *The Earth Turns South* (1919) and *The Eagle Sonnets* (1942). I have also obtained and use personal and business correspondence between him and fellow writers.

Though the secondary sources are short, they are nevertheless impactful. These include reviews of his work by various authors that appeared in literary magazines such as *Seven Arts* and *The Nation*. Also included are opinions about Wood held by his contemporaries, mainly found in specific (auto)biographies of these other authors. A number of simple abstracts of Clement Wood's life from multiple sources also provide useful information.

Along with these, I analyze poems from Louis Untermeyer's anthology *Modern American Poetry*, originally published in 1919 and updated in 1962, in relation to Clement Wood's. By using an anthology that was developed around and after Wood's life, I can better understand what kinds of poems and authors were understood as modernist or south agrarian during this time period.

Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to obtain copies from three special university collections, which contain letters and literary and biographical information about Wood. These include the Clement Wood Papers, from Brown University; the Sterling Wood Papers from the University of Alabama, Wood's alma mater; as well as correspondence with Louis Untermeyer from the Louis Untermeyer Papers at the University of Delaware. I will also be utilizing the *Cambridge Companion* to both *Modernist Poetry* and *The Literature of the American South* to help define these periods. I have organized my sources into groups considering the mixed nature of the information I have gathered. These groups include works by Clement Wood, literary articles, reviews, letters sent or received by Woods, special collections material from university libraries, and articles/books concerning the literary movements pertaining to Wood's poetry.

### **Clement Wood's Works**

One of the main books I am drawing from is Wood's autobiography, *The Glory Road*, published in 1936. This is, however, anything but a usual biography. When I ordered the book, I expected to learn about the details of his life, his family, and his work, but when I began to read, I did not find a narration of his personal life. In fact, Clement even says in his Forward "Not that this book will hold the seriatim chroniclings of every transaction that has made up the forty-seven years I have known and loved earth," but that nonetheless readers "will thrill to my life, because it is the life of one of these writer chaps" (*Glory Road*, 11). What I found in the autobiography was more of a life in poems, a life in feeling and experience.

What makes Wood's autobiography so perplexing and rich, as well as jarring, is this complete divergence from our contemporary understanding of what biographies should be. Instead of a narration of his factual life, we get to experience Wood's life through his emotions and emotional development. He hides nothing and bares everything--from admitting to his slight oedipus complex (47), to portions about each specific girl he loved and the outcome of their love (87-99), including sections dedicated to both 'Elinor' Wylie and 'Sarah' Teasdale.

It is through this work, specifically, that I have gained a better understanding of Wood as a person and as a poet. It has provided me with a basis of who I take Clement to be--brazen, passionate, critical, detailed--and what he believed as both a writer and a person. In *The Glory Road*, I discovered Wood's great love for life, his love for love itself, his utter fearlessness and dedication to the passions and emotions of human existence, his anger at religion and war and industry, but most of all his belief in natural life. "You're a persistent fellow, life," he says, "with long tenacious clutch. If trees can grow on a bare stone cliff, I can do as much" (*Glory Road*, 60). He says "From my earliest hour, I have been in love" (46); "When I die, bury my heart in

the South” (237); and of course, “O, I am careful that these lines tell nothing to you” (100). From these we catch a glimpse of Wood’s emotional fearlessness and wry sense of cynicism.

This autobiography serves as a light into Clement’s inner feelings and views on subjects like politics, religion, nature, and the purpose of poetry. While it is not a place to find factual information, it is an amalgamation of Clement’s experiences as a humble writer from the South, which a reader may interpret as (s)he will. In my research I use this narrative as a supplement in analyzing his poetry and societal views, so that in better understanding Wood as a person, I am better able to interpret his poetry in relation to the literary movements that he worked in.

As representative of Clement Wood’s earlier poetic thought and style, I utilize his 1919 volume of poetry, *The Earth Turns South*. Wood was thirty-one years old when this was published, as opposed to forty-six years old at the time of his autobiography’s publication. This collection contains a variety of poetry, mostly formal and mostly pertaining to nature. The main themes he explores consist of our human connection with nature, commentary on the horrors of war, and criticism of increasing industry, racial tensions, and religious questioning regarding all of these. Also around this time, his *Glad of Earth* collection, a book of similar themes and style, was published.

Take the poem “Immortality,” for example, composed of three long stanzas in iambic tetrameter with a semi-regular aabbcc... rhyme scheme. The beginning line “Come, War” (*Earth Turns South*, 1) immediately invokes an imperative and commanding tone that continues throughout the poem. In this poem, Wood explores the nature of war in relation to the nature of man, and then to nature itself. In the poem, lines like “And laughing water cannot wet/With what drips from a bayonet” (44-43) demonstrate Wood’s mastery of rhyme and metaphor, in terms of the personification of war acting in and through men. In the final lines, Wood is at once able to

condemn war and man, with “Nor do the thrushes of the sky/Prepare a wholesale way to die” (47-48), as well as invert the usual connotations of words like ‘friend’ and ‘savior,’ in “So War, best savior, comes, to friend/Him to his red and sudden end” (50-51). This emphasizes the bitter cynicism he holds towards the presence of war in the world as opposed to natural occurrences. In this way, we end up with the idea of war as purging man of his destructive ways through participation in war itself, but that nothing exists in nature that devises such a terrible thing.

The remainder of *The Earth Turns South* functions in a similar way. Wood’s younger poetry is raw, passionate, and unabashed. He discusses topics from racial segregation to intimate love in a very personal and open manner. Wood does not hide anything from a the reader who is willing to take time to think through his poems. We find in this volume a bold and fearless man who, despite criticism, bears his soul to the world.

This volume serves as an example of Wood’s earlier work, and as a basis for his earlier themes and visions. It also reveals how many understood his work in terms of both craft and merit, as I will discuss later. In regards to literary movements, this book reveals some of Wood’s major influences in technique and style, such as the connection to nature, similar to Romanticism.

As for Wood’s later works, I utilize his collection of sonnets titled *The Eagle Sonnets*, published in 1942, as representative of his later style. Most of the sonnet sequences in this volume address Wood’s feelings toward human love, human connection with nature, and mortality, all strung together in an extended metaphor involving the eagle. I think the two lines “We cling to life” (38), occasionally repeated throughout, and “I am a tongue for beauty” (39), serve as succinct representatives for the overall tone and feel of the collection.

These would have been written and published in the heyday of Clement's career, and as such, elicited many critiques, both positive and negative. If in his earlier books, *Earth Turns South* included, Wood was searching for and developing his style, in *The Eagle Sonnets*, he truly discovered and solidified that style, even though we only see his controlled, formal poetry. This collection aids in understanding how he was publicly received by his contemporaries as his career progressed, as well as how his own style changed and developed.

Wood also published a number of novels, and even though my focus is on his poetic style, many characteristics of that style are discussed in reviews and critiques of his novels, most specifically his 1920 *Mountain*. Though most of his novels were published early in his career, they provide another way in which to explore his stylistic development. They also help to understand how he was viewed by his contemporaries, in terms of style, ability, and theme in resulting reviews and articles. In *Mountain* and other novels, Wood addresses issues of racial inequality, growing disconnection from nature and with that rising industrialization, as well as human love and passion.

### **Reviews, Articles, Letters, and Special Collections Material**

As Clement Wood was extremely involved in the public literary world, editing and writing for multiple publications, many of my sources consist of literary magazine reviews, critiques, and articles about or involving Clement Wood, both written by other authors and by himself. Most of these pieces range from 1-5 pages in length and involve both his poetry and his novels. The majority of these articles are from the newspapers and literary magazines *The Nation*, *The Bookman*, and *The Saturday Review*, with minor contributions from *The English Journal*, and range from the 1920s to 1930s, with the exception of a few later reviews in 1950.

The main works involved include *The Eagle Sonnets*, *Mountain*, and his earlier collections of poems, *The Earth Turns South* and *The Tide Comes In*. The authors vary piece to piece, and due to the style of the print media, some are unlisted. I have also similar articles from two small collections of material regarding Clement Wood from the Universities of Alabama and Delaware.

For the critiques, many consist of short blurbs in sections like ‘Recent Poetry’ or ‘Books in Brief,’ where a critic reviews a few recent notable publications, giving each a small focus. This is the case for *The Nation* issue July 26, 1919, in which Wood’s *Earth Turns South* is reviewed simultaneously with other recent works, such as *The Years Between* by Rudyard Kipling. In this kind of review, the piece is usually given general praise or criticism, such as “[Wood’s] free verse is fluent, wholesomely colloquial, and less sloppy than most” (“Literature: Recent Poetry” 115).

The other main type of critique consists of longer, more detailed reviews of Clement’s overall style and literary progress in relation to the literary community. Take, for example, A.M. Sullivan’s review of *The Eagle Sonnets* in *The Saturday Review*. Here Wood is first assessed overall, such as something like, “Wood is a real troubadour, gifted with high passion and verbal power” (Sullivan, 19), and then the critic goes into a more detailed critique of the specific work.

In both these types of critique, Wood is usually awarded praise intermixed with critique about rigidity of form or lack of depth or struggle. He is also often faulted for his tendency not to hold back on what he disliked, which ostracized him, in a way, from the major literary scene. In a response letter to William Orton Tewson, a major critic in New York in the 1920s-30s, to the inquiry ‘Do you care what the critics say about you?’ posted in the ‘Literary Review’ of the New York Evening Post, Wood states that he “care[s] keenly what critics say about my work,” and

goes onto mention a variety of critic responses to his poetry and book *Poets of America* (“Dear Mr. Tewson,” 1). Wood exercised his opinion on what he considered good poets of America brazenly and received much conflict over the book. Among the responses, Woods notes how he “did not reflect who would have to review it--namely the poets themselves,” that is, he didn’t care what his contemporaries thought about who he included or did not include (“Dear Mr. Tewson,” 2). He refers to the poets who greatly criticized the book as “vociferous eccentrics” who “roared themselves purple in the face, calling the book claptrap, because it had with justice so described them” (“Dear Mr. Tewson,” 2) as well as quotes a few of the critics themselves, such as “‘Mr. Wood’s prose style is as bad as his criticism’” (“Dear Mr. Tewson,” 3). From Wood’s response to Tewson’s inquiry, we can see strikingly Wood’s rather prickly relationship with other writers, both Modernist and the Southern Renaissance.

There are also a few critiques and reviews by Wood himself, of authors like Carl Van Doren or his ‘Poems of the Month’ column in *The Bookman*. These are important in understanding how Wood viewed his contemporaries’ works, in comparison to himself and other authors. That Wood held prominent positions like co-editor and columnist of varied magazines further demonstrates his in-depth involvement in the literary world, and attests to his (at least partial) influence and credibility as a writer and critic.

As for the special collections in Brown, Alabama, and Delaware, they contain a mix of literary, personal, and biographical information. The material from Brown was the largest collection with the most variety. As such, it becomes more of a reference-supplement to my current research goal rather than a specific source for details. The material from Delaware is located in the special collections of Louis Untermeyer, within which is a subfolder of correspondence relating to Clement Wood, as they were both professionally and personally



involved. As such, most of these letters are Wood's responses to prior letters sent by Untermeyer, which generally focus on literary topics such as responding to each other's current works. The Alabama collection contains more biographical information such as marriage licenses, genealogy trees, pictures, and personal letters to his mother and father. These letters offer an insight into Wood's personal interactions in a less-pressured sphere, such that in these we expect to be reading Wood's genuine self, as opposed to how he might act in the literary world.

In these reviews and letters Wood begins to reveal his own attitude toward his literary fellows, and this in turn says much about how others treated Wood. Clement was blatant in his likes and dislikes, as well as unabashed in pointing out flaws, as seen in his letter to Tewson. For example, he notes in the opening line of one of his 'Poems of the Month' columns, "The June magazines are as full of poetry as a pine tree of ice cream cones" (Wood, "Poems of the Month," September 1922, 61). These kinds of articles shed some light on how this brazen criticality reflected back on how his own work was reviewed, in that most of the authors are equally unsparing in their like or dislike. Like how he notes in his autobiography, "...a lot of people don't like him [Wood], poets especially; they say he isn't a bit polite about their poetry" (*The Glory Road*, 14). Furthermore, they demonstrate his familiarity with important authors of his time, such as Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost.

### **III. "I was reared less than I grew..."**

On the whole, in relation to these themes, Wood had several major influences that contributed to his style and values. These literary influences include both contemporary and historical movements. The main movements affecting Wood during his life were Modernism and

the Southern Renaissance, also known as the South Agrarians. As for historical, Wood was influenced by the Romantic school, most significantly American Romanticism.

Throughout the duration of his literary career, Wood was encapsulated in the Modernist mindset from all sides. He worked as a secretary to Upton Sinclair in his earlier years, became colleagues with Edwin Markham and Theodore Dreiser during his involvement with the Socialist movement, and published for a variety of literary magazines at the forefront of the American literary scene. It is no wonder then that Clement Wood would garner major influence from this movement.

In relation to Modernist poetic ideology, David Ayers notes in his chapter titled “Modernist Poetry in History,” how “a specific poem may be judged ‘modernist’ in terms of its advanced technical features or in terms of the modernity of outlook of the producing poet” (11). This dual nature of the literary modernist movement is thus intertwined with the social aspect of American culture during the era. In general, due to the rapid industrialization and new emphasis on technological progress, modernism was as much as literary movement as it was a societal phenomenon; just as American society was treading new technological waters and experiencing and experimenting, so too was the literary realm incited with an urge to experiment and challenge tradition. And all of this led to an increased use of “the tools of print capitalism to promote [the artist and writer’s] artistic and literary schools and movements,” as Paul Peppis explains in his chapter “Schools, Movements, Manifestoes” (28). And this is exactly the culture we find Wood heavily involved in, despite his criticalness of many modernist writers.

One other main tenet of Modernist poetry identified by Ayers involves the very literary criticism that Wood produced much of. Ayers explains how at times “the criticism of poetry receive[d] far more emphasis than its creation” (19), perhaps partly due to the rapid change and

general sense of immediacy in burgeoning American cities during the time. Overall, Modernism as a literary movement drew heavily from the energy, power, and, at times, overwhelming shock of the social growth and change during the 1900s. Wood was no exception to these societal influences, but may have simply reacted to this general tide in a different way. As Ayers concludes in his article, “we might well regard as modernist any poetry which refuses to accept its place in history” (26); and, seeing as Wood’s poetry refuses to adhere to many mainstream modernist characteristics, such as I will address in later sections, he might very well be modernist in the sense of denying modernism as a whole, and instead working in a retrospective mindset with Romanticism, but influenced by the conglomerate ‘modernist’ mentality nonetheless.

Back in the South and Alabama, the Southern Renaissance was a literary movement active in the heyday of Wood’s literary career during the 1920s-1930s. In John Matthews chapter “The Southern Renaissance and the Faulknerian South,” he identifies the main ideology of the South Agrarians as stemming from Allen Tate’s manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand*, published in 1930 at the height of Wood’s own career. Matthews explains from this how major themes of the South Renaissance emphasized “the South’s superiority over modern Northern industrialism, market capitalism, materialism, lack of cultivation, and irreligiousness” in terms of the South maintaining traditional agricultural and religious practices and beliefs (117). Though Wood was mainly in New York during this time, much of his work deals with similar critiques of industry and urbanization. However, Wood criticized the aspects that Matthews identified in regards to both the South and North, and to mankind and America in general.

Interestingly, Wood’s work actually adheres to irreligiousness in the sense of not following organized religion as opposed to encouraging belief. His work emphasizes human

emotion and appreciation for the natural world, which becomes for him a sort of religiousness. But, strange enough, he is extremely critical of the South's Christian dogma and devotion, despite his entrenchment in Southern religious culture. Still, on the whole Wood's literary work demonstrates key similarities with both the Southern Renaissance and Modernist writers. These similarities will be discussed as each poem and theme is analyzed between Wood and these two movements.

The other major influence to Wood's poetic style is that of American Romanticism. Since American literature by Wood's time in the 1900s had mostly transitioned out of romantic tendencies, I will not be reviewing individual poems from this era; instead, I will clarify the main commonalities from this movement into Wood's own poetic ideology.

As I mentioned before, Wood was first introduced to Romanticism by his grandfather, W.C. Richardson, which is perhaps why it became such a strong influence for him. Briefly note the entry for W.C. Richardson in Benjamin William's *A Literary History of Alabama*:

Warfield Creath Richardson (1823-1914), a professor at the University of Alabama, published a book-length poem, *Gaspar: A Romaunt*, in 1843, but before that time he had achieved a statewide reputation as a writer...Richardson left a line of literary descendants, including a daughter Belle Richardson Harrison, a poet, and a grandson Clement Richardson Wood, author of about fifty books (131).

From Wood's autobiography, it can be surmised that Richardson possessed similar beliefs in regards to composing poetry and passed on the Romantic attention to nature and admiration for form. In his autobiography, Wood expresses how he viewed his poetic purpose almost as a sort of continuation of Richardson's effort. He says "I've always tried to be what he wanted to be" (Wood, *Glory Road*, 12). W.C.'s sister and Wood's aunt, Belle Richardson Harrison, also

contributed to Wood's romantic tendencies. She was a poet most notable for her 'dialect verse' and served as a sort of mentor and supporter of him and his work well until the latter part of the 1930s (Brown University, *Voice*, Goddard, 81).

If what Clement Wood drew from his relatives was heightened attention and appreciation to the lyric depiction of nature, so similarly did he gain a kind of romantic self-appreciation from the writing of Walt Whitman. Wood admired Whitman's style, and even composed a small book of poems about him, co-written with his first wife, Mildred Cummings in 1923. The one of only 100 printed copies I was able to access digitally from the University of Rhode Island's Walt Whitman Collection, contains a series of dedication poems to the 'Good Red Poet,' as Wood termed him. Wood praises Whitman in how "he sought equality of opportunity to allow each man and woman to individuate into his own best self, whatever that might be" (Wood, *For Walt Whitman*, 23) and praises his emphasis on the value of human and natural life as a kind of life-ideology and way of living in the world. It is evident from this how central Whitman's writing was to Wood's own development of all three themes, natural, social, and spiritual.

Overall, from the Romantics, Wood was imbued with an awareness and appreciation for the natural world, human life, and emotion, which developed and strengthened as he made his way on his own into his modern literary scene. From the American Romantics also, Wood seemed to pick up his keen attention to traditional poetry styles, in both terms of form and strict use of meter. However, while his surface style may have remained similar, it is clear that he is not just a latter-day Romantic because many of his poems are also experimental in their application of common speech as well as the variety of issues he addresses, which I will explore in his individual poems for each of the three themes.

#### IV. “April in Alabama--and I not there!”

##### Wood and the Natural

Much of Clement Wood’s poetry involves or addresses the importance of human connection with the natural world. As such, this is one of the overarching thematic areas present in his work, both poetry and fiction. In order to understand how this theme functions in Wood’s work compared to the poetry of other literary styles, it is important to clarify his relationship to and beliefs about the natural world.

To begin with, Wood’s views on nature go hand in hand with his view of city-life and industry as a kind of opposition. That being said, Wood’s poetic philosophy regarding the natural world can be condensed into three broad statements: 1) The natural world has inherent value; 2) Nature develops man’s emotional and reflective capabilities; and 3) The natural world plays a vital role in the life and progress of mankind. It is important to note that Wood does not concretely lay out his system of belief in any direct way, but rather, I arrived at these categories based on ideas found in his poetry and autobiography.

Having grown up in the mountains and forests outside of Birmingham, Alabama, Wood possessed a keen affinity for the natural world “since I was only a tiny boy” (Wood, *Glory Road*, 37). Many times in his autobiography he expresses a feeling of kinship to nature, how he is “a part of that land” (51) and is “no stranger to you, sun-mother, but a son, and brother to these blossoms” (39). But he also experienced the hustle and bustle of life in the burgeoning city of New York where he lived and worked through the 1920s on. It is no wonder then, that his poetry expresses this dichotomy as well. It is clear from lines like “April in Alabama--and I not there!” (50) that the strain of city life strengthened his regard for the natural world, as I will explore more in the social thematic area.

Clement Wood's "Green Leaves," found both in his 1920 book of poems *The Earth Turns South* and his autobiography *The Glory Road*, is an overall representation of his views regarding human connection to nature and exhibits each of the three overarching themes above. It also demonstrates his irregular metered and rhymed verse style, common to many of his poems. Especially because of the natural focus, this poem attests to Wood's similarity to Romanticism, both the English and American schools.

In this poem, Wood's speaker narrates an afternoon expedition to the park, which transitions into philosophical musings comparing the world of man with that of nature. In regards to tenet number 1, Nature has inherent value, we find this idea embedded in the contrast between man's tendency toward corruption and the purity of the natural world. Here 'pure' means pure in the sense of simple functionality, that is, functioning as is without need for change or development, as compared to the corrupt industrial progress of man and man's vice.

In the poem, the natural world contains "life" (62) itself, the very essence of growth and living, as opposed to man's "brick-walled street[s]" (57). The speaker proclaims that "There will be life where all is dead" (62), that natural life is the kind of life that will persist after man is gone and that we are innately indebted to nature for our short dominion over it. "What are we/But leaves of a tree," (66-67) the speaker asks. What are we but leaves "Treading, and trod/By man and god/Into our mother and grave, the sod?" (72-74). Here, the speaker conveys the uncertain nature of mankind, as well as the relationship between man and the land as both our life-giver and burial place. Thus, Wood's views that nature is valuable to man in itself, not just as resources, that natural life is as precious if not more than human life, and that it is important to spend time contemplating nature, all come together in "Green Leaves" under the overarching theme that 'Nature has inherent value.'

Moving onto the second tenet in Wood's attitude toward nature, 'Nature as developing man's emotional and reflective capabilities,' in section I, nature incites the speaker's passions and feelings, and serves as both a pacifier and catalyst of emotion. Immediately, the trees are personified as having control over the land which they occupy. The trees are called "a triumphant horde" (12) of "green mysteries" (12); they are "proudly green" (3) and alive, compared to the mechanistic car the speaker occupies and the "bricked streets dying or already dead" (19) that he drives on. The speaker is prompted by his experience driving through the park to connect with the trees as other living beings, yet, at the same time is threatened by their power because of his recognition of subservience to the natural world. To him, the trees appear "in no human ways serene" (27), and are "So painfully, passionately green" (32) that they almost frighten him to a dumbstruck state.

But, in the development of the speaker's feelings, this fear of the trees soon turns to identification with and celebration of them, as if he understands their attitude toward the world. Because of this he is able to assume the future after mankind, where "their vivid shawls/Will cover the nude brown limbs of earth" (77-78). He then goes on to distance himself from mankind as a whole, instead imagining "when man's hand has lost its cunning,/In some unguessed untimed disaster" (87-88) that there will be only the victorious trees in an "endless sweep of...joyous green" (92).

The speaker's trip through the park thus becomes a kind of exercise in reflection as he is forced to confront the majesty of nature and then to either join in that majesty or attempt to control it, as man has sought to do. In spending time in nature, the speaker demonstrates how we can escape from the pressure and pretension of societal conventions back to the world in its raw state. Furthermore, by bringing religious imagery into the poem through an imagined past



“Before man was” (75) this poem also begins to suggest Wood’s belief in a natural religion, that nature is capable of breeding the same sense of ease and purpose that religions claim to do, thus, time spent in nature is a kind of religious/spiritual experience.

In terms of the third tenet, that ‘Nature plays a vital role in the life and progress of mankind,’ this is extremely evident in “Green Leaves.” It is first noted that the trees are like “on silent sentry” (20) when he enters their domain, the park, and even goes so far as to identify himself as “the human foe” (21) to them. This presents an animosity between man and nature, in which man is in the wrong, but only because of man’s attempt to dominate nature instead of honoring it. Overall, Wood maintains that nature “was our first and our last home” (17) and that we have a place in the world, but when we attempt to exploit nature for our gain, nature then must “[Tear] apart what man has paved” (63) and correct our wrongs. For Wood, humans were born out of nature, and so are inherently connected to it--the land is as a mother, so we owe nature appreciation and allegiance.

Also within the third tenet, this poem suggests that no matter how we abuse the world, nature still regrows and still reclaims the land as its own. From lines like “They [the trees] will march free on their own night” (46) and “See how the slow boughs reach an arm/Over the fence to things forbidden” (52-53), we see how nature is capable of redressing man’s terrible acts. Nature here possesses a kind of autonomy independent of man. Nature came before man and will continue after man as well. While nature is “over the earth in triumph running” (82), man can but “lie and see the slow serene/Onward march” (89-90) of the trees as they retake their land. Because, after all, even us humans are, as I’ve pointed out, “leaves of a tree.../Flung by the wind” (68, 70). We too are birthed from the earth and bound to it, even though we attempt to control it

with industrial progress. In this way, nature is vital to man's progress and continued existence on earth.

Integrated within this heavily contemplative poem are characteristics of Wood's distinct style of writing. This includes his adherence to metered verse along with his mastery in rhyme. Briefly, the poem is composed in an irregular meter and rhyme scheme, mainly iambic tetrameter, and is split into six sections of varying length. Overall, Wood ties together his emphasis on the power of the trees with an abundance of '-een' rhymes, stemming from the repetition of 'green.' Sometimes Wood coolly ties together stanzas with inventive couplets like "monochrome" and "home" in lines 16 and 17. Others he spaces the rhymes further apart, but does not leave any line unrhymed, such as with "engraved" in line 59 which is not rhymed until line 63, "paved."

As I mentioned, the poem is mainly iambic tetrameter, with the exception of section V, where the meter is cut in half, giving it a more sing-songy rhythm. This distinguishes the section from the others, which draws further attention to one of the major intimations of the poem that I quoted before: "Treading and trod/By man and god,/Into our mother and grave, the sod?" (72-74). Though the rhyme of 'trod' and 'god' with 'sod' is a bit weak, the triple-rhyme solidifies the gravity of the remark. And it remains even more impactful in that it both concludes the section and question "What are we/But leaves of a tree" (66-67). Overall, Wood then ends the poem strongly on the rhyme of 'green,' which draws to a close all of the feeling and description associated with the trees.

On the whole, this poem, "Green Leaves," contains all of Wood's major beliefs about the natural world and demonstrates Wood's characteristic style. As such, "Green Leaves" serves to illuminate his poetic philosophy on this subject. Now, I will turn to poems from respectively

Modernism and the Southern Renaissance to see how they address the natural world in order to understand Wood's similarity to and/or difference from these movements.

### **The Natural in Modernism: Frost**

As an overall example of the general tone which Modernist poets adopted toward nature, I will analyze Robert Frost's "After Apple Picking," written in 1914 and included in Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry* anthology. Though perhaps Frost's style and attitude toward nature are more unique to him than to Modernism as a whole, Frost was directly connected to Clement Wood in the literary scene, which means I have a more concrete way of knowing how Wood regarded Frost's poetic style, and then Modernism as a whole.

Overall, the main distinction between how Wood addresses nature in "Green Leaves" and how Frost addresses nature in "After Apple Picking" is that Wood tends to identify with nature and to extract value from nature and apply it human activity, whereas Frost tends to do the reverse--insert human values and problems into natural observation. Both, however, portray the natural world as integral to living a full life.

As a Modernist, Frost's poem is distinctly more realist than Wood's portrayal of nature. In fact, Untermeyer expresses in his introduction to Frost's work in *Modern American Poetry*, that his poetry is "altogether natural, yet fanciful no less than realistic" (165), as well as that Frost "cannot suggest a character or countryside without informing the subject with his own philosophy" (166), another common characteristic in his poems.

The speaker in "After Apple Picking" is very much the force of the poem; the natural details revolve around the speaker's involvement or lack of involvement with them. He says things like, "But *I* am done with apple picking now" (6, emphasis added) and "*I* let it [a piece of

ice] fall and break” (13, *emph. added*). In these lines and the whole of the poem, the natural world is understood in conjunction with man’s actions and thoughts. Whereas, in “Green Leaves,” Wood’s first person speaker becomes almost a third person narrator who seems to embody the feelings of the trees themselves, as with “Strange new shoots will force their way:/Life, green life, will conquer the clay” (Wood, *Glad of Earth*, 64-65).

In “After Apple Picking,” the main concern of the poem is what “This sleep of mine” (38) means for man, what this “Essence of winter sleep” that is “on the night” (7) entails for the speaker’s future life. In Frost’s poetry, as Untermeyer noted, we are offered nature through the eyes of certain speakers; we are viewing the natural world in the same way the speaker here “look[ed] through a pane of glass” (10), a sheet of ice, and “held [it] against the world of hoary grass” (12). Just as this speaker’s vision of the apple orchard is distorted by the ice which he looks through, so too is the nature/meaning of the poem presented within this specific speaker’s experience. In other words, we are aware of the human presence imparting these specific experiences to us.

The difference with Wood’s poem is that, since the individual presence is minimized, it’s as if nature itself were voicing its beliefs in the poem. By removing individual opinion from the poem, Wood asserts that this speaker’s interpretation of nature is true to what nature itself would say or do. Because of this we are given a sense that these are nature’s words instead of an explicit understanding of nature viewed in the eyes of Frost’s specific speaker. Where Wood unites humanity as part of nature, as in, “What are we/But leaves of a tree” (66-67), Frost qualifies nature within one human’s existence: “I am overtired/Of the great harvest I myself desired” (28-29).

Though both Wood and Frost emphasize the natural world in their poems, there are distinct differences that mark Frost out as more of a Modernist than Wood. As for their opinions of each other's work, Wood mentions in one of his pieces "Poetry's New Tools" from the *English Journal* in 1933, how Frost's poetry has "all the natural magic of conversational speech" and that "Frost especially...in me" "rouses the strong emotions" (Wood, Poetry's New Tools, 620). Though, Wood does casually claim that another one of his poems "has gone beyond" Frost in terms of natural "metric innovation" (Wood, Poetry's New Tools, 626).

Frost on the other hand, expresses a similar critical courtesy toward Wood, as he notes in a letter to Louis Untermeyer how Wood:

took an inclement little slap at me in a letter yestre'evn...only just as much to say (unasked) you write poetry, Robbie Frost, and so do I, and just as you don't like all I write, so I don't like all you write. He wood, Would he, claim equality with me? More claimant than clement. What are you going to do with him when his book is sent you for review? It is bound to be bad in any binding (Frost, 537).

He is much more cordial later on in a letter directly to Wood where he even says "I should like to have your book" (Frost, 536). It's unclear what Wood's answer to any of this was, but the two seemed to at least meagerly recognize each other. Understanding the literary relationship between these two authors further helps to distinguish Wood's attitude toward the Modernist tendency toward flexible experimentation and realism as a whole.

### **The Natural in Southern Renaissance: Teasdale**

Especially because Clement Wood was so deeply attached to his homeland, the South, in terms of natural appreciation, it is important to understand how the Southern Renaissance poets

treated this thematic area of nature in comparison with Wood's. As such, I will utilize a short poem by Sara Teasdale called "Water-lilies," published in 1920 and included in Untermeyer's anthology.

Just as it seems many Southern writers have a complicated relationship with the South, so too does Wood recognize and admonish his connection to the natural South and its complex history. In *The Glory Road*, he declares "I accept, as I must, the blame of my birthplace, where a long shame holds in courteous cruelty the black dregs of slavery" (76) but he also expresses deep affection for the wildness of the South in how "I am a part of that land. It seeded me, budded me, brought me through bloom to fruitage" (Wood, *Glory Road* 51). Teasdale, originally from Missouri, also exhibits this connection to nature and homeland, in line with Southern Renaissance literature. Specifically in regards to the south, David Davis notes in his chapter "Southern Modernists and Modernity," how "the writers of the Southern Renaissance were obsessed with the past, especially as modernity threatened the traditional ways of living" (90), and because of this focused more attention on pastoral and provincial depictions and themes. That "Southern modernity was fundamentally rural" perhaps sheds some light on the intensity and depth of Wood's nature focus in his work and how clearly he presents a distinction between the natural world and material world of man (Suarez 93). And though many of Teasdale's poems focus on human relationships in terms of love, she also expresses a similar kind of natural longing that Wood does in his "Green Leaves," albeit without the stark condemnation of city life.

Teasdale's "Water-lilies" is a two stanza poem written in standard ballad style with an alternating rhyme scheme in iambic hexameter. It expresses two kinds of human relationships to the natural world in a flowing lyrical style. The first stanza depicts the fate of one severed from

nature; the second, one who identifies with and appreciates the natural world, such that it residually affects one, leading to a kind of yearning.

This is similar to the effect of the trees on the speaker in Wood's poem as he drives by. The "living sheen" (28) of the trees "tortured our eyes" (29) so much that the watchers "scarce dared to look upon the whole" (32) of the scene. At once these trees are something to cherish and laud, while at the same time they shock and amaze the speaker in a kind of terror similar to that of interactions with a deity. There is a duality present in the desire and reflections of Wood's speaker in that the speaker can at once take pride and joy in describing the eventual triumph of the forest, while also recognizing that part of that triumph is over humanity, and thus himself.

In Teasdale's poem, the duality lies in the difference between one who "ha[s] forgotten water-lilies floating" (1) and one who "remember[s]" (2). Thus the distinction is made between one who is connected to nature and one who is not. The one who forgets water-lilies and, by extension, natural phenomena, can do so and "return and not be afraid" (4). But the one who remembers must "turn away forever" so that the one "will not come at dusk on closing water-lilies,/And the shadow of mountains will not fall on your heart" (7-8). Teasdale is offering a look into both ways of interacting with nature, whereas, Wood focuses on exemplifying how each of us can work toward developing a relationship with nature. Since his speaker's trip through the park is like an example of an exercise in reflection on nature, Wood reveals the process of contemplation in the natural world, in order to encourage and promote it in others. The emphasis is on the value of the trees in themselves, not that they are just an impetus for human thinking.

With Teasdale, it is ambiguous as to the benefit of being in either position: is it better to forget and then be able to return to view the water-lilies, or constantly keep the memory of nature in one's mind, such that it is almost a burden to be removed from the water-lilies and the only

solace one can gain is from distancing oneself from them completely? Thus, her focus centers more so on the mental costs or benefits of connection to nature, versus Wood's focus on the inherent value in nature regardless of what a human perceives it as.

Though on the surface Teasdale expresses contrasting relationships in nature, the theme of the poem can be understood metaphorically as well. As many of her poems involve romantic relationships, so too can this be seen in that light. And, as Wood greatly emphasizes human passion and emotion, this relates directly to his themes as well. In using the scenario of watching water-lilies, Teasdale may be alluding to overcoming a heartbreak or great problem. With the first stanza, if one is able to forget and move on from the issue, the "wet, sleepy fragrance" (3) of romance and desire, then one can return to the scene or source of the problem and remain unaffected. But, if one is unable to overcome the heartbreak, it is better to stay away "where pools are far apart" (6) so that the suffering will not continue to remind and produce pain. This double layering, though well-developed, draws attention from the physical natural world, and instead qualifies it within human experience, instead of the trees "march[ing] on their own night" (46) and existing independent of humans, like with Wood's poem.

With Teasdale's use of nature, "Water-lilies" can be understood surface level as offering two human ways to engage in the natural world and as a metaphorical journey of love and heartbreak. Seeing as Teasdale deals with love as an overarching theme in her poetry, nature here becomes an overlay with which to convey her thoughts on the process of healing after a heartbreak. In fact, we see natural depiction in a few of her other poems like "Wisdom" and "August Night" being used in the same way as a supplement to deepen and develop her thoughts on relationships. As such, Teasdale seems to use nature more as a backdrop or a tool, rather than as an end in itself to reflect on. In Wood's "Green Leaves," the trees and natural scenery are the



focal point of the poem in and of themselves. While Wood does rely on nature metaphors in relation to human passion at times, he also exhibits a stark focus on depicting meaning in nature for nature's sake.

Many of the Southern Renaissance writers placed an emphasis on pastoral scenery and natural description as a way to combat or resist America's growing modernization as well as to revive traditional southern values (Davis). Both Wood and Teasdale rely on the natural environment, but depict nature for different reasons. Both being borne out of the South's increasing conflict between modernization and traditional agriculture may have contributed to the amount of importance nature served in their works.

## **V. "I am your tongue, Birmingham!"**

### **Wood and the Social**

In many of Clement Wood's poems, he accentuates disparities between the social and industrial sphere of mankind and the organic and sensitive sphere of nature. He also emphasizes experiencing deep-felt human emotion, whether painful or pleasant. His views overall are grounded in the human sphere of experience and he draws attention to deriving meaning and value from our present lives. In his autobiography he invites us "To love freely, widely, when the whim awakes, whomever the ruffled desire lights upon, for your stirred fancy, not for their starved sakes" (Wood, *The Glory Road*, 207). Wood's treatment of this social thematic area is mainly grounded in the ideas of the corruption of mankind being connected to materialism and industry and of feeling for feeling's sake, as expressed in the prior quote, instead of for ulterior motives or obligations. This goes hand in hand with Wood's admiration toward the natural world, as it exists concretely alongside humanity. In order to illustrate Wood's poetic ideology

concerning the social realm and human relationships, I utilize “The Smithy of God” from *The Earth Turns South*, and his collection, *The Eagle Sonnets*, written in 1942, specifically sonnets 20 and 48 of ‘The Eagles Mate’ section.

To begin this theme, Wood hardly disguises his disappointment in what he sees as the corruption of city-living men, hidden under the guise of ‘progress’ and ‘technological advancement.’ Early on he claims, “I am your tongue, Birmingham!” which he refers to periodically as “O grimy city” (52). Wood, having worked previously in several judicial positions, including a court lawyer, experienced both the high-strung business lifestyle and then the life of a writer and critic in the literary scene. He also transitioned from an upper-class childhood in the South to city-slicker living as an adult in the North. These major transitions exposed Wood to multiple contrasting lifestyles and communities each with their own distinct social expectations and customs. In line with this, many of Wood’s poems regarding the social realm express an omniscient and objective narrator who witnesses various people and situations from the outside and then comments on them. Wood also utilizes symbolic characters that personify different societal values and aspects that Wood wishes to declaim or promote.

The latter is exactly the case with “The Smithy of God.” This poem, written as a series of choruses and chants, centers on the divine figure Newark, who is the “forger of men” (*The Earth Turns South*, 2). The voice shifts from first person to third depending on who is speaking which chorus. Newark himself is a personification of the New Jersey city, and as such is seen working in his forge where he “forge[s] a body and mold[s] a soul” (11) and creates men, like tools, for the city.

The chant-like style and heavy rhythm throughout the poem serve to reinforce Wood’s attitude toward cities and their inhabitants. The majority of stanzas in this section begin with a

resounding “Clang” (15, 23, 31...) followed by what occurs during the clanging, such as, “Clang, as two thousand whistles scream” (19). The in-text stage-style directions even say “(The voice suggests the noises of the city.)” (14). When referencing or alluding to anything man-made, the language is similarly industrial and technological, as with phrases like “Brass-throated sirens” (21), “Throbbing and stunning” (25), and “whistle and whirr” (27). And similarly, the rhythm and repetition evoke a feeling of mechanical, repetitive tasks, like those associated with factory work.

Furthermore, Wood utilizes heavy alliteration and consonance throughout, accompanied by deliberate and forceful end rhymes to create the sense of mechanic toiling associated with Newark’s forging activity and the men he thus fashions. Note the weight of the ‘l’ sound in the line “The jangling clangors ripplewise roll” (13), and likewise the strong ‘p’ sound in “Pound and pound in their pulsed routines” (24). End rhymes like “beat” with “feet” (25-26) and “trains” with “chains” (27-28) further solidify the fact that these men are fashioned and ‘forged’ deliberately and systematically, like tools, as opposed to organic, spontaneous natural creation.

In subsequent stanzas, the speaker changes from Newark’s first person to a labeled ‘anti-chorus’ that laments Newark’s actions and projects. They condemn Newark’s creations saying, “You take God’s children, and forge a race/Unhuman.../Filling with hatred and greed the whole,-/Shriveling the body, withering the soul” (51-52, 56-57 ). This interchange of voices reflects the battling contrast between the benefits of industrial progress and the harsh reality that it creates for those who function within these newly burgeoning factory systems. The anti-chorus alludes to this very consequence in:

“What have you done with the lift of youth  
As they bend in the mill, bend in the mill?

Where have you hidden beauty and truth,

As they bend in the mill?" (58-61)

Thus, the anti-chorus functions as a rebuke and jeremiad for the fate of Newark's creations and his position as forger of men. In representing both the physical city, Newark, and the social effects of the city on man, the anti-chorus, Wood imbues the mechanistic world with emotion and passion, such that he is then able to demonstrate how unliving machines affect and interact with living existences.

Though Newark's efforts are condemned by the anti-chorus, there still exists a certain pity for him and his creations, as if to dull the meaninglessness of the industrial system and draw attention to the utter sadness of toil and progress that man has been reduced to. In the final section, Newark makes a plea for his position, in that, even though "my hammer is blind to the ruin it makes" (90) and "numb to sorrow and aches" (89) nonetheless, at times, his "vision dims/at the sight of bent backs and writhing limbs/And sometimes I blindly err" (93-95).

Newark, though previously associated with only harsh and jarring description, goes onto express hope and awareness of his position, that he wants to "out of the smothering din and grime/I forge a city for all time:/ a city beautiful and clean" (100-102). In this turn, the city is viewed in a different light, and we are shown a glimpse of the benefits that a city can provide and the goodness that industry can bring.

But, as mentioned, Wood only offers a glimpse. The final stanza returns to condemning Newark and his corrupt creations even more caustically than before. He describes his work again, how "I forge a people fit to dwell/Unscathed in the hottest heart of hell" (105-106). The poem ends with a solid reiteration of Newark's bold claim, "Then I will cry, and clearly then,/I am Newark, forger of men" (113-114). The association of men with hell has a dual meaning in

the sense that men are more corrupt and ambitious than even that of those in hell, but also that Newark is shaping men to withstand impending industrialization so they will not suffer as much. Thus the poem ends similar to how it began and we are left with Newark's promise of continuing his forging duties. This continuation suggests the lasting control and impact of technological and industrial advancement in America. But the promise of Newark's forging resembles more so that of a vaguely present looming adversary than a hopeful war-cry in defense of man's progress.

Through personification and the chorus-style form, Wood expresses the complex relationship between man, industry, and man's inner drives. It is Newark who forges the men into this world of industry, not the men advancing and creating themselves. Likewise, the anti-chorus can only distantly lament Newark's progress and remains incapable of action. Overall, Wood presents a contrast between the social world of man and industry as having both physical and emotional origins and consequences to man's tendency toward corruption. Wood does not place the blame for man's vice on industry, but rather he draws an inverse relationship between the two that attests to man's culpability and role for/in man's own faults.

At the heart of Wood's social theme of the dichotomy between industry, man, and nature is an emphasis on human emotion and the human ability to feel. This is best expressed in *The Eagle Sonnets* which reflects not only his view on human connection, but demonstrates his precise attention to form, rhythm, rhyme, and metaphor. This collection was received with overall praise by critics and reviewers. In his autobiography, Wood notes that Gamaliel Bradford, whom Wood dedicated his earlier book *The Tide Come In* to, "Ranked *The Flight of the Eagle* as the most profound and sincere probings of modern thought in English" (Glory Road, 287), and likewise William Rose Benet in his review said "They are clearly and courageously

reasoned. With all their direct reality they touch exaltation of mood” (Benet 553). In this collection, Wood intertwines human love with the natural world in bouts of metaphor and personification in order to philosophize on the transitory nature of human existence.

In the section “The Eagles Mate,” which is a sequence of 60 sonnets, Wood narrows his focus to that of specifically human romantic love and longing. As this book is dedicated to his wife, Gloria Goddard, and many also appear in prose form in the chapter “Love--Gloria” of his autobiography, we can surmise that most of these sonnets reflect his feelings about their relationship. But there are times when it is difficult to distinguish whether the speaker is professing love toward something in nature or to a human, which further attests to Wood’s devotion to both nature and human emotion.

For instance, in sonnet 20 of the sequence, both the speaker and the addressee are identified with natural imagery. The speaker “flame[s] like green dawn over the hill” (8) when “summoning April shouts its warm/greeting” (7-8), and likewise the “soil on which my soul is fed” is also compared to the changing colors of the sky (10). And though the ‘you’ in the poem is taken to be the ‘soil,’ the last two lines seem to suggest human companionship expressed by a simile to nature: “for our two hearts will mate like glowing birds/in more than the sweet blossoming of words” (13-14). These last two lines bring the poem outside of itself through self-referral, as the poem is the ‘blossoming of words’ that this companionship will go beyond. It therefore more suggests human love instead of natural appreciation.

Also part of Wood’s emphasis on experiencing human emotion is embracing painful experiences alongside joyful ones, as they are both valuable parts of existence. We witness this in a shorter sequence of the sonnets called “The Eagle’s Mate,” where he narrates his feelings of anguish and heartbreak at his wife Gloria’s surmised affair, also mentioned in *The Glory Road*.

In sonnet 48, even in this terrible pain, Wood is able to recognize the importance of feeling intense emotion. For himself and Gloria as well, he “[sends] him down to you [her]” (1) “with a smile” (9), so that Wood “meet[s] defeat with a hint of style” (11). Wood relinquishes the woman to her lover so that she “may give [her]self to him permanently” (3); he places value in her continued happiness even though it gives him a “little silent cup of agony” (13). And in sonnet 49, he derives merit from the experience, however painful, in that though his “overbrimmed joy alters fitly to pain” (12) he “shall smile--laugh, even” (13) in letting her go experience greater happiness for herself.

Craftwise, the way Wood goes about composing his sonnets is in a conversational but no less intricately metered style. Sentences flow from line to line in a way that lessens the blow of his attention to exact rhymes, though he does rely on consonance and assonance to carry rhymes as well. Note how the rhythm of “I walk and breathe beside you, held as near/as my poor breast can clasp your shining heart” (3-4) in sonnet 15 of “The Eagle’s Mate” reads easily as one continuous sentence even though it is split for rhyme and meter. Many of the sonnets contain a fluid rhythm such as this.

Earlier in the actual section “The Eagle Sonnets” Wood also employs the repetition of rhyme pairs throughout the section, which tie together the sonnets to wider-reaching themes, such as the beauty of nature and human emotion. Specifically with beauty, this is the rhyme of ‘star’ and ‘are,’ used as the end couplet of sonnets 56, 58, 62, and the final sonnet in the section, number 87. Not surprisingly, each rhymed pair evokes different meaning, as with sonnet 56’s “when the dark sea leaps to enfold a star./Beauty is all we know and all we are” (13-14) and 87’s “--A thin sound of wings throbbing, thin and far.../and silence freezes each inscrutable star.” (13-

14). In doing this, Wood maintains a sense of connectedness between the individual sonnets without becoming overly repetitious.

And of course there is Wood's characteristic mastery of rhyme. Within the sonnet's we find pairs such as "reticences" and "ugly fences" in lines 2 and 4 of sonnet 41, as well as "cackle" (1) and "grackle" (3) and "them" (5) and "hem" (7) in sonnet 38. And though there are a few scattered 'fire's and 'desire's and other lesser rhymes throughout, overall Wood showcases his ability to rhyme intentionally without the lines sounding jarring or stunted.

Part of Wood's overall success in his sonnet sequence is his ability to convey complex philosophical observations involving human love and nature through simple language and similes to familiar occurrences. In this collection, Wood explores deep emotions of all kinds and holds little back in terms of bluntness or directness. He condemns and praises with equal vigor, which is perhaps why this collection received generally good praise. It attests to Wood's emphasis on the need to experience deep and raw emotion in order to live a full human life.

### **The Social in Modernism: Sandburg**

To illustrate how Modernists address this social theme, I am using Carl Sandburg's poem "Chicago," written in 1914 and found in Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry*, which addresses city-life in a manner similar to Wood's poem but using more characteristically Modernist techniques. Throughout the two poems, both utilize personification and abstraction to characterize the two cities, Newark and Chicago. However, whereas Wood portrays Newark as an individual character distinct from the narrator to condemn the dangers of city life, Sandburg identifies himself personally with the personification of Chicago and acknowledges the negative aspects of the city but embraces them and subverts them into the city's very strengths.



In a fashion similar to Newark's declaration as forger of men in the first section of Wood's poem, Sandburg's "Chicago" begins with a series of declaratives about the city that evoke a direct and forceful chant-like rhythm. This section is indented and set apart from the body of the poem and includes rigid descriptors like "Hog Butcher for the World" (1) and "Stacker of Wheat" (2), which serve as repeated phrases in the final stanza.

A first-person narrator is then directly introduced, immediately bringing the personification of the city into a personal relationship with the speaker. Sandburg's speaker goes onto describe detailed, unique experiences that serve to characterize the city in a broader sense, such as "it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again" (7). From this small scale example, we understand that there are issues with violence and injustice in the entirety of the city as a whole. In Wood's poem, he takes a more indirect route as he establishes Newark as a semi-divine figure who is in a smithy made by god himself. And though there is a chorus speaking back and forth, it is never by the narrator directly. Also, in this specific poem, Wood employs the reverse of this technique of using a unique description to reflect larger, more abstract issues within the city, in that he broadens the issues he wants to address by generalizing them into conglomerate experiences. We see this in descriptions like how "a hundred thousand feet/...into the mills and factories pour,/Like a narrowed river's breathing roar" (15, 16-17). Again and again, Wood utilizes conglomeration and overarching descriptions to explain Newark's forging progress. This ties into Wood's overall theme of the impersonal nature of cities and how Newark, the city, is fashioning an almost mindless mass of persons to simply carry out rote work.

Sandburg, however, adds a level of subversion where Wood does not. Sandburg does not deny the dangers and dirtiness of city life; in the first several lines he very well admits to

Chicago being “wicked” (6), “crooked” (7), and “brutal” (8), but he subverts these negative qualities into aspects of the city he is proud of. This turn comes in line 10, where the speaker responds “to those who sneer at this my city” (9) to “Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive...” (10). The remainder of the poem continues characterizing Chicago and embraces the supposedly negative qualities as strong assets even though Sandburg does retain hints of criticism of Chicago’s corruption. And this is seen in how the city laughs “Under the smoke” of debasement with “white teeth” (18) as well as haughtily laughing like “an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle” (20). Still, this Chicago, this city nonetheless contains “the heart of the people” (21) and is ultimately “proud to be” (23) each of the titles that begin the poem, thus completing Sandburg’s detailed subversion.

Overall, Sandburg employs forceful yet colloquial language and words choice, which lends itself to the gossip-like narration of the speaker as he defends the city against various epithets and rumors spoken by crowds of people. Sandburg also employs his characteristic fluid free verse style in line with other Modernist writing tendencies. Wood on the other hand presents his poem as an almost spiritual ancient chant, despite it being so grounded in the mechanical realm. Wood’s use of stage directions and deliberate rhyme and meter further imbue the poem with an atmosphere similar to that of an archaic ritual chant.

In Wood’s “Smithy of God,” he remains serious in his condemnation of urbanization and industrialization and offers little in praise of the city Newark. Interestingly, in Sandburg’s treatment of this social theme, the dangers of urban industry are not dismissed nor disregarded, but rather become strengths and merits warranting pride in the city by its citizens. In line with Modernist thought, both are writing in reaction to their changing American society as industry leads to the development of massive-scale cities all with their own problems (Ayers). As well,

Wood and Sandburg were originally from more rural portions of America in Alabama and Illinois, and so were perhaps more vividly affected by the contrast between urban and rural life.

Both writers address this issue head-on with a lack of fancy allusions or deeply intricate metaphors, which demonstrates their general divergence from the more Romantic contemplative style to the more direct and avant-garde Modernist style. It is clear that in his poem Wood expresses similarities to both Romanticism in the rhyme and meter and Modernism in the handling of the subject matter. However, when juxtaposed with Sandburg's clear Modernist social realism in "Chicago," we see how the line remains blurred as to how well Wood fits into this movement on the whole.

### **The Social in Southern Renaissance: Aiken**

In Ernest Suarez's chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of the American South*, "Southern Verse in Poetry and Song," he identifies one of the overarching influences of Southern poetry as that of musical lyric. This is seen in both the "call-and-response structure of the spiritual" and the "sets of identical or near-identical lines" and "reflective meditation" of Blues music (Suarez 73). As such, many Southern writers worked and experimented with this new-found musicality within poetry. Specifically in reference to the social theme, Wood's "The Smithy of God" directly employs both these identified aspects of spirituals and Blues music. Similarly, the 1940 poem "The Road" by Conrad Aiken in Untermeyer's anthology employs a certain musicality, though his is more akin to that of fairytale or myth in its sing-song tone and narration. This use supports Suarez's observation that "Blues poetry" served as "the most indigenous line of Southern verse" (78) during this period. Both

writers utilize these older, more familiar tones and qualities in order to examine and discuss contemporary issues, in this case industrialization and urbanization.

This heightened awareness to industrial progress was also a major common issue in Southern Renaissance literature in general. As Davis notes, from the advent of the Agrarians this attention to the “deleterious effects of industrialization on traditional Southern culture” was discussed (96). And this was in part due to the South’s agricultural background slowing the process of urbanization, which served to further distinguish the South from the whole of America until it was rapidly forced to ‘modernize’ surrounding the first World War (Davis). The 1920s-1940s were both the heyday of the Southern Renaissance and of Wood’s and Aiken’s careers, and, as such, both were engrossed in and influenced by this cultural milieu.

Where Wood’s “Smithy of God” relies on the extended personification of Newark to illustrate the dangers of industrial progress, Aiken’s “The Road” relies on the allegorical metaphor of peasants constructing a road to draw attention to the labors of industrial progress. Though Aiken’s is composed in blank verse and Wood’s is rhymed, they nonetheless evoke a similar mystic, archaic atmosphere, which draws further attention to the modern subject matter of each poem.

Aiken’s poem begins *en media res* with common fairytale characters like vague ‘old men’ and ‘peasants’ explaining to the narrator their goal of completing a road that they’ve been constructing. The symbolic ‘Road’ is said to be built “Of human blood and stone” (6) and many “had given all/Their life to build this twelve poor miles” (17). The speaker narrates the sheer age and decrepitness of the men he walks with in the night, suggestive of the immense strain and toil of their continued endeavor, which seems to have no end. As the old man guides the narrator along the road, this can be understood as an allegory for the general progress of mankind and its

relationship to development of the environment. These men have been laboring “three hundred years” (25) toward their goal of future peoples “passing from east to west, or west/To east.../All meeting in the road and singing there” (30-31, 32). In short, men have been toiling to take control of the environment and to forge it into something manageable to men. The ‘road’ represents man’s continued efforts in social and industrial progress and is shown to be cruel and slow-moving, but nonetheless it remains a source of pride and hope for those working at it. The road, this progress, is repeatedly associated with ‘grief,’ ‘pain,’ and futility, but still the peasants labor; these men are giving and have given “human lives unnumbered” (26) for the progress of this road, and only seem to receive “unrewarded work and grief and years/Of pain” (43-44). And even in the old men’s vision of success, they acknowledge that “‘Grief will be in it’” (34) but that there will be “‘beauty out of grief’” (35) when the road is complete. The last command from the old man to “‘Blow out your lantern now, for day is coming’” (38) hints at a kind of hope in the symbolic transition from darkness to light, and so leaves a small touch of positivity toward the road and the work of the men.

At the end of the poem, there is a turn by the speaker, who, though separate from the work of the old men on the road, nonetheless is affected and changed by their interaction. As the speaker continues walking, he soon finds “How tears ran down my face, tears without end” (51) and concludes that he knew “that all my life henceforth was weeping” (52) for “human grief, and human/Endeavor fruitless in a world of pain” (53-54). Here again is the use of ‘grief’ and ‘pain’ in relation to the eternal work of progress on the road. There is also continued reference to ‘west’ and ‘westward,’ this direction being symbolically connected to the Manifest Destiny of early America and how America is continually seeking to progress and improve for the future.

The shift in the speaker in the last two lines of the poem closes off the allegory and drives home Aiken's symbolic portrayal of the industrial progress of mankind. The speaker finds after his short journey along the road that "when I held my hands up they were old" (55) like the men he walked with, and leaves off the last line of the poem with "I knew my face would not be young again" (56). The speaker, having witnessed the intense toil of building the road, becomes wrinkled and old as well, as if the hardship and pain of the laborers permeated into himself. This is an outward reflection of his inner realization about the fruitlessness of human material progress. Again and again he reflects how these peasants have given their lives for the road, but receive nothing in return except pain and grief, and in the face of this realization, he too withers like them. But not because of years of physical work, because he is able to recognize the cruelty of their toiling, part of which is that they continue to work on the road incognizant of the implications of the work.

Aiken's "The Road" presents a much more somber and allusive approach to the social issue of societal progress and lends itself to a variety of meanings and interpretations. In relation to "The Smithy of God," Wood's treatment of the issue is much more direct and forceful. Wood's consistent use of rhyme emphasizes the spiritual nature of the poem as a kind of spoken chant. All is told through the words of Newark and the Chorus, giving it a personal drive. Aiken's also had this personal quality in the use of a first person narrator, but the narrator remains mostly observational and reflects on the actions of those around him instead of conducting action himself. Newark is the driving force of the poem, the one accused by the chorus, the one creating all and any action within the narrative. He is unapologetic in his work at the forge as in the final section he "*rise[s] to a song of exultant triumph*" (97) declaring "out of the smothering din and grime/I forge a city for all time" (100-101). Newark also can be said to

symbolize progress and industry just as the ‘Road’ does in Aiken’s. Where Aiken employs ‘the Road’ as an allegory for social progress, Wood personifies social progress as Newark; thus we can see how ‘the Road’ and ‘Newark’ are two manifestations of the same social theme.

Referring back to the Southern Renaissance as a whole, it is clear that Aiken and Wood draw from southern agricultural values in how they deal with and understand the increasing modernization of the America in which they lived and worked. John Matthews in “The Southern Renaissance and the Faulknerian South,” explains how this struggle was common in the South Agrarians in how they viewed the South as “mov[ing] with anxiety into the modern world as it looks back at a disappearing past” (130). Central to the Southern Renaissance movement was this almost confrontational or defensive quality of writers toward the relationship between traditional southern values and the surge of new ideas and technology in the 1900’s (Matthews). And both Aiken and Wood seem to express this complicated relationship, among other qualities, like the aforementioned style of spiritual and Blues music patterns.

## **VI. “You shall have no other god but one, and he is yourself” (107)**

### **Wood and the Spiritual**

The third major theme that Wood addresses poetically is centered in the spiritual realm. Many of his natural and social poems include religious undertones, such that this theme becomes an underlying foundation on which his natural and social themes rely. Wood alludes to this integration in how he was “reared on Red Mountain...though with Methodist tips to my horns and hooves” (*The Glory Road*, 12). However, for a variety of reasons, including “rebel[ling] against my father’s politics and religion and conservatism and everything he stood for” (*The Glory Road*, 13), Wood ended up abandoning organized religion early in his career.

As time went on, Wood grew increasingly antagonistic and critical of Christian dogma and its conception of God in relation to the reality of people's moral actions. His critique of religion and Christianity in general is far more outright in his later works *The Eagle Sonnet* and *The Glory Road* than his earlier ones, *The Earth Turns South* included. That being said, I will draw from sonnets 78 and 85 of the title section of *The Eagle Sonnets* in order to illustrate Wood's treatment of and regard toward religion in relation to the natural world and the world of man.

Bound up in Wood's religious ideology is an emphasis on human interaction with the natural world, theme one, and on the inherent human responsibility for moral action, theme two. These two overlying themes then coalesce into a kind of human-driven religion where god is taken as a manifestation of the self, thus making man responsible for his own behavior, purpose, and happiness. In reference to nature, man is understood to have originated in the natural world, and as such is held accountable for his interactions with it, as it sustains, creates, and recycles life--it is life in its purest and wildest form. In *The Glory Road*, Wood alludes to this periodically in chapters like "Youth into Man" with lines like "To that true god I call myself..." (44) and "Give me great love of myself--love that will whip me to unfold my full flowering in the blighted gardens of men" (45). Likewise, this human-driven religion is developed in *The Eagle Sonnets* and is particularly strong in the aforementioned sonnets.

Beginning with Wood's overall attitude toward an omnipotent and omnibenevolent 'god,' in sonnet 78 of the sequence, he directly states "I do not hold/a firm belief in god...only a knowledge.../that he is not" (2-5). This goes hand in hand with his belief in the responsibility of man for man's evils and mistakes. Wood generally relates an over-fondness of 'god' with a lack



of accountability in man's actions and faults. In reference to this he says how with man, he "hold[s] that more is wrong with him than/the scanted right" (6-7).

Wood's sense of religion was deeply influenced by his experience of America's modernization in particularly the South. And this is something that many Modernist writers experienced during the 20th century, as Peppis notes in his chapter on Modernist schools (28). Like other modernists too, as a result of this shock of industrial society, Wood "take[s] up the tools of print capitalism to promote artistic and literary schools and movements" (Peppis 28), as seen in his continued involvement in literary magazine and print culture scenes.

Similar to other modernist writers and artists, Wood witnessed prejudice, cruelty, and hypocrisy in many spheres of American urban and rural life. For Wood specifically, he saw this moral degradation in the treatment of African Americans in his home state Alabama, especially as a judicial employee; the horrors and wages of the Civil War and its aftereffects in the returned soldiers; and the burgeoning exploitation of the working class in new factories and industry. In all of these Wood witnessed the failure of the south's traditional Christian religion to provide support for those suffering and to promote peace between different people and beliefs. Instead of religion acting to reconcile differences and strengthen morality, Wood saw the church as "writhing, black-frocked maggots, fattening on the decaying corpse of a crucified man" (Wood, *The Glory Road*, 106) who hypocritically preached virtue, but ended up being part of the problem of increasing vice.

On the whole, sonnet 78 is rather bleak in terms of hope for man's future redemption in a moral sense. He notes how "this deficiency" (7) in morality has "grown greater, as the years have faltered on" (8), and prophesies "a fate for him grimmer and blacker/than the most pessimistic philosophies/have indicated" (10-12). This sonnet is harsh and despondent and draws attention to

an almost irredeemable corruption within mankind. The sonnet is delivered in a plain, conversational style, as if one were simply relaying trivial observations. The rhymes are casual and undramatic as well, such as “out” (1) and “doubt” (3) and “as” (5) and “has” (7). The most striking one, if any, is the final couplet off-rhyming “subtly rotting” (13) with “simply nothing” (14), which reinforces the bleak depravity of man’s impending future.

In line with Wood’s emphasis on nature, he personifies man in nature in the volta as well. And this is a common personification throughout his poetry in general. Oftentimes, Wood will equate man with the natural world in order to draw attention to the contrasts between the two in the opposition of created-corrupt and creator-pure. In the sonnet, Wood says “Man is a plant,” equating man with nature, but then quickly subverts this as the man-plant is “now subtly rotting” (13). In the final line then, even though man is joined to nature in a metaphor, man does not last the way that nature as symbolic of life does. For, after the man-plant rots, instead of dying into rebirth with the cycle of natural decay, man becomes “why, simply nothing” (14).

Fortunately, sonnet 85 presents a much brighter attitude toward humanity’s abstract moral virtues in relation to Wood’s religious theme. Here he deals with metaphors of faith, truth, love, and reason all in relation to human lives. Wood identifies these virtues as chiefly human-created goods that guide one’s behavior and constitute how one understands the world, and so they can be understood as ‘gods’ in a sense. Overall, the sonnet expresses a kind of somber disillusionment as one realizes the arbitrary nature of our virtues and morals which we still must adhere to in order to live in the world, whether through an organized religion or not.

Each of the virtues is first presented for what they are, that is, human constructs subject to error and change. Then, as the sonnet continues, each is nonetheless stressed as necessary to man’s continued pursuit of meaningful existence. With faith, though it is “the dream that things

known false are true,” (1) a jab at religious belief, we nonetheless “must cling to still” (9). Likewise, despite truth being “our feeble vision in the dark” (2) it is still “a god to serve, though we die” (10); Love, “that superemest pleasure men pursue” (3) is subsequently “the dear controller of our will” (11); reason is called a “cheater” (8) for its role in disillusioning humans of their religious fanaticism, but is vital precisely because of this. For Wood, reason and logic strip away the dogmatic mist of mysticism as “man’s last anchorage” (9), which allow for humans to live more fully. This is suggested in the final couplet, where, even though reason, as the anchorage, “let our craft drift out to sea” (13) and shocked us from our blind reliance on otherworldly powers, it remains the most important virtue, as “we will not find a truer guide than he” (14). Again, throughout this sonnet, Wood employs a conversational tone with simple rhymes, which give the sonnet a melody-like rhythm, especially because of the parallel sentence structure with the description of the virtues.

Through these sonnets, we see how Wood’s spiritual views are interwoven inseparably with his attitudes toward nature and the nature of mankind. He assigns more value to the natural world than to any dogma of organized religion and takes man to be a sort of ‘god’ to himself. In *The Glory Road*, he observes how “Christ was hanged upon a tree. But *it* was slain before he” (66, *emph. added*). For Wood, man’s relationship with the natural world is a physical kind of manifestation of man’s inner state as corrupt or virtuous. All the industrialization and mechanical progress seems to bring out the worst in men, as they oppress and slaughter not only each other, like in the first World War, but the natural world as well in order to make room for such industrialization. Throughout his poetry, Wood calls for re-attention to nature and to introspection on our human assumptions and worldviews that lead us to make the decisions that we do. By professing a sort of ‘religion of self,’ Wood somewhat echoes Whitman’s great

emphasis on self-belief in “Song of Myself” in line with Romantic ideology. At the same time, Wood is reacting to the developing social and philosophical ideas present in 20th century America, that contributed to the development of both Modernist and Southern Renaissance ideology, in his own particular style (Ayers).

### **The Spiritual in Modernism: Wylie**

For the spiritual theme treated by Modernism, I am using two poems of Elinor Wylie from the *Modern Anthology of Verse*. These include “O Virtuous Light” and “Let No Charitable Hope” published in 1923. According to Untermeyer in his introduction to Wylie’s poems, he notes how Wylie was “influenced by the fiery spirit of Shelley” during her travels abroad (273). Thus, we can expect to find traces of British Romanticism in Wylie’s works similar to Wood. Also similar to Wood, Untermeyer makes reference to Wylie’s use of philosophical and spiritual/mystic ideas. He explains this in how her “intellectual versatility is eventually reinforced by spiritual strength” (Untermeyer 274) as she developed as a writer.

Like some of the other poets discussed here, Wylie also had a connection to Clement Wood, though it is unclear if they were personally involved or only knew of each other’s writing. Clement refers to Wylie’s merits and weaknesses in an article called “Poetry’s New Tools” found in Vol.22 of *The English Journal* from 1933, years after Wylie’s death, in which he discusses the state of the current literary and poetic hub in America. In this, he compares contemporary poetry, or rather, the lack of good contemporary poetry, to its recently deceased predecessors. In regards to Wylie herself, Wood acknowledges her as one of the “last of the important figures of the first twentieth-century renaissance” (Wood, “Poetry’s New Tools,” 615) as well as that “she added something...to the poetic technique; and that was the use of

consonance, instead of rhyme” (Wood, “Poetry’s New Tools,” 624), which serves doubly as a critique.<sup>2</sup>

In “Let No Charitable Hope” and “O Virtuous Light,” Wylie employs the use of rhyme and meter, opposed to the tendency toward free verse in Modernist poetry. As a result, this gives Wylie’s poetry a sound more akin to Wood’s than most, which could be partially attributed to her noted connection to Romanticism. In the treatment of the spiritual, we find a common theme in Modernist poetry that can be said to be a part of both Wood’s and Wylie’s poetic ideology. In Peter Nicholls chapter on “The Poetics of Modernism,” this is expressed in how:

Much of the complexity of modernism thus stems from its location at a crossroads between old and new science, and between orthodox religious belief and...a primarily aesthetic ‘religion’ in which imagination and sensibility silently usurped dogma and belief (Nicholls 52).

This tension between traditional religious ideas and the aesthetic presence naturally in the world is resolved/expressed in two different ways. In Wood’s treatment of this theme, he embraces the beauty and purity of the natural world in favor and opposition to traditional religion, seen as man-made make-believe. Wylie, however, reverses this in her treatment of the spiritual, embracing instead traditional religious views and how the Christian god encapsulates/vivifies and contains all natural phenomena; nature is qualified by god instead of being an independent physical entity.

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<sup>2</sup>Furthermore, in the chapter “Words to Girls” of *The Glory Road*, there is a short section titled ‘Elinor,’ which is but one of the fourteen girls of Wood’s romances that he addresses in the chapter. And while no clear link can be made as to the identity of the ‘Elinor,’ Wood’s extreme focus on the beauty of this woman with “crowned tresses” “black with grief” whose “scent is torment” and the repetition that “there is none under sun like to her” (Wood, *Glory Road*, 95), lends credence to the possibility of her being Wylie, as she was very much admired for her immense beauty with pale white skin and dark black hair.

In “Let No Charitable Hope,” Wylie emphasizes the separation between human religiosity and connection to the physical/natural world, whereas, Wood in his previously discussed sonnet 78 of *The Eagle Sonnets*, stresses the internal connection between man and nature. Where Wylie declares “Of eagle and of antelope;/I am in nature none of these” (3-4), Wood avows “Man is a plant” (13). Wylie then goes on to further distinguish herself as “I was, being human, born alone” (5) and “I am, being woman, hard beset” (6). These direct and clear statements are similar in tone to Wood’s own declarations about his beliefs and how “this is how.../I see, and know, and live” (1-2). As such, common characteristic of both seems to be the preference for clear and concise language without shying away from firm affirmations. However, the ideas within these similarly formulated phrases relate inversely.

In Wylie’s poem, she emphasizes her singularity and need for self-reliance as if forced by the harshness of the world to “[squeeze] from a stone/The little nourishment I get” (7-8). In the preceding lines, the speaker distinguishes between receiving assistance and surviving by one’s own merit. Spiritually, it is not exactly that she is separating herself as a human from reliance on outside powers, but rather that she refuses “charitable hope,” or, hope offered out of pity or condescension (1) as opposed to hope borne out of her own abilities and desires, her own “masks outrageous and austere” (9). This speaker is sure and steadfast in her sense of self, but not to the point of singling herself out completely from the world. For, in the final stanza, the “the years go by” her, as opposed to her actively living through ‘the years,’ which draws attention to her still finite and temporal existence and reliance on forces beyond her control (10). Even though “none” (11) of these years have completely dominated her in fear or enjoyment, they nonetheless affect her life and living, such that she can make the distinction between hope as ‘charitable’ and hope as chosen of her own accord. And while this staunchness and clarity is also emphasized in

Wood's own spiritual poems, they differ mainly in the relationship between humanity and the natural world.

In further relation to Wood's heavily spiritual sonnets 85, Wylie employs a similar kind of mystic personification of abstract qualities in "O Virtuous Light." Written in the common ballad form in iambic tetrameter, "O Virtuous Light" has common and clear-cut rhymes paired with semi-archaic language. This strengthens the religious tone of the piece, just as Wood's use of conversational and casual language emphasizes his focus on human intellectuality. Like Wood, Wylie personifies 'reason,' but where Wood lauds reason as "a truer guide" (14) to man, Wylie warns of the capacity of self and reason to distract man from faith and belief in the divine.

In Wylie's poem, this instability occurs when "the instrument of reason fail[s]" (3) which leaves the "star-gazing eyes" of the religious believer, "struck blind" (4). The speaker then goes into detail the effects of the 'light' of reason as a potentially malignant force when lorded over religious faithfulness. Even though Wood prefers reason and admits that "we must cling to [faith] still" (9), Wylie does not exactly afford the same generosity to 'reason' in contrast to faith. For the speaker, this light has the power to loosen the faith of a believer and is termed a "destructive spark" that can twist and obscure the "the natural dark" of religious uncertainty with its emphasis on logical scrutiny (10, 12). In these lines, Wylie alludes to industry, which links this advent of reason to science and industrial progress, as reason is deemed "Mysterious as steel and flint" (9). This is an interesting comparison especially since Wood in his condemnation and warning of industrial progress and the corruption of man, does not seem to express this same link between mechanical and logical prowess, but rather focuses on reason among other virtues as man-made qualities that man must nonetheless nurture and cling to in order to live meaningfully. Ayers in his chapter notes this struggle with logic and belief to be common in Modernist thought,

and terms it a tension in poetic ideology between “the growing primacy of science as truth-telling discourse” and “the growing awareness of history as a process of change” (13).

Moving along with Wylie’s and Wood’s inverse relationship between faith and reason, in the next stanza of “O Virtuous Light,” her speaker makes the connection between the self-creation of human virtue, the fact that man is creator of his own gods, or ideals. This too is something that Wood claims various times in his work. And, as such, is a key component in his human-religion, that humans create their own gods and that the self is a god man must embrace. However, where Wood applauds this connection, Wylie warns against it.

The concept of human self-creation for Wylie is expressed in “This light begotten of itself” in line 15 of stanza four. Before this though, Wylie rallies to “break the walls of sense in half/and make the spirit fugitive” (13-14). She then proclaims that this new over-reliance on reason is “not a light by which to live” (16). And again in the final stanza, the speaker pleads to “virtuous light,” (21) that is, the light of divine faith and grace in contrast to the light and “radiance” of human reason (23). In supplicating the ‘virtuous light,’ the speaker asks it to win over the light of reason, that is “engendered of its own” (24), which subsequently ends the poem.

Likewise, in sonnet 76 of *The Eagle Sonnets*, Wood identifies this idea of human-created god and self in the final couplet. In these last two lines he states that “being is a glass within whose face is shown/the one pale god the universe has known” (13-14). And subsequent in the sonnet sequence are sonnets 78 and then to 86, where Wood expands upon his religious ideas and views on god, which have been discussed prior. In Wood’s sonnets, in contrast to Wylie, this realization is not something to be warned against or wary of, but rather a thing necessary to recognize in order to live more fully and passionately in life as a human. His poetry suggests that man is declining further from virtue partly because of increasing industrial progress and



materialism, but partly also to the continued emphasis on traditional dogma and ideas of god, which stunt man's growth in a way.

All of these ideas go back to Nicholls comment about Modernist thought being at the "crossroads between old and new science, and between orthodox religious belief" (52). In Wood's and Wylie's poetry is expressed this innate tension between newfangled logical and technical progress and the mystic and emotional basis of the past in regards to the roles of religion and science. Wood overall tends to reject traditional religion, but not in favor of absolute logic and science because he associates this with the dangers of industrialization. He emphasizes the importance of human reason and humans as self-making in their ideals and beliefs as distinct from the cold materialism of city life.

Wylie however, represents a different approach to this issue, in how she, in both poems discussed, recognizes the importance of human autonomy and self, but warns against a too strict reliance on reason because it is linked to science and logic which were beginning to undermine traditional spiritual mindsets during this period (Nicholls). Furthermore, she advocates for an increased and revitalized faith and belief in god in order to combat the growing corruption of humans in the wake of rapid technological advancement. In line with the Modernist focus on "poetry in terms of its social situation," (Ayers 12), both Wood and Wylie are searching for ways to overcome and resist the sinfulness they witnessed in city life: Wood turns to inner emotion and connection to the purer natural world, and Wylie turns back to traditional religious beliefs, both as a way to continue searching for meaning and virtuous living in their changing societies.

### **The Spiritual in Southern Renaissance: Ransom**

As for the South Agrarians, I am utilizing John Crowe Ransom's "Old Man Pondered," originally published in the 1930's and found in Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry*. Though it was later revised by Ransom in the '60s, I am utilizing the original version. Ransom was in the forefront of the South Agrarians, along with Allen Tate, and was responsible for "fostering a line of formally oriented Southern lyric poets that extends into the twenty-first century" (Suarez 76), of which I suspect Wood was influenced by this tendency. And in the formative, *I'll Take My Stand* collection of essays, Ransom and others "envisioned pastoral life as a panacea to communism and corporate capitalism" (Suarez 78), which presents a link to Wood's general critique of capitalist materialism. Furthermore, Suarez also notes how Ransom focused a lot on duality within his poetry and "consistently privileges aesthetic experience, and science often serves as his nemesis" (76). As such, many of Ransom's poems tend to intersect the religious or spiritual realm of thought even though they may not be explicitly religious in an organized sense.

This is the case with "Old Man Pondered," which is a mix of allusion, abstraction, and is overall surreal in nature. Though it is not a sonnet, as Wood's are for this spiritual theme, it remains a viable and in-depth comparison piece. Interestingly, this poem of Ransom's has a similar tone to Aiken's previously discussed poem, a kind of mystic narration. Like Wood's Sonnet 85 in *The Eagle Sonnets*, Ransom utilizes personification of abstract virtues and vices in relation to the speaker. He begins with a speaker wandering and contemplating an old man, and, asking "How came it [his eye] monstered in its fixed intent?" (8), offers his own explanation, from which we can then infer qualities of the speaker. As I mentioned Ransom's poetry straddles multiple thematic areas, so too does this poem express both spiritual ideas and ideas in relation to human emotion and love.

The speaker begins his speculation of why the old man is so intent on himself that he does not look at or notice the speaker and his lady even though they pass by three times with the idea that it must be because of the old man's years of guarding himself against danger and betrayal. He notes how "many a bright-barbed hate/Burning had smote against" (10-11) the man's eyes "To enter and destroy" (12), but that the man closed his eyes before they could enter. In doing so, the old man kept these "grim leers" (13) from the "inner chamber where sat Hope" (14). However, with the line breaks and punctuation, it could either be that by closing his eyes to everything, he guarded himself but at the cost of his Hope becoming bitter, shielded, and incapable of love, or that guarding himself also guarded his Hope from becoming "misanthrope" (15) since the looks of others would have "bled her courage with a thousand spears" (16) instead of that being a consequence of the man not letting anyone in. In this ambiguity, we see Ransom's lyric attention to detail at work. Suggesting both consequences of the old man's actions allows for multiple layers and interpretation of the situation by both the speaker and the reader.

In Sonnet 85 with Wood's personification of abstract virtues, there is a similar ambiguity in the definition and function of these semi-absolute virtues. In line five, he declares that "Right is a thing of person and of season" and that it fluctuates and changes to meet man's needs. And the beginning definition of faith, that it is "the dream that things known false are true" (1) is inherently dualistic as well. As Wood turns to speak of love and to then reverse the meanings of these virtues, so too does Ransom introduce this theme in relation to his speaker's observations.

Like the old man shuts his eyes to 'hate and scorn,' the speaker speculates next that "he must guard as well/Against alluring love" (17-18) because it is just as dangerous as malintent. In fear that "one light arrow/Be sharpened with a most immortal sorrow," the old man closes himself off to love too (22-23). In order that he would not be damaged by anyone or anything,

the old man shut himself off to any kind of attachment, good or bad and so “kept his mansion shut of hell” (24). The speaker offers this interpretation, but does not condemn nor affirm it; rather, he turns to introspect on “what age must bring me” (27). Unlike the old man, the speaker “look[s] round bold/And seek[s] my enemies out” (27-28) in relation to danger. In relation to love, the speaker “leave[s] untold” the looks that he gives to the woman he walks with, and those which he concludes he does so “thinking [she] will not scold” (30). It still remains unclear which method of engaging others brings one the most meaning in life. By ending on the speaker’s assumption he will not be rejected, Ransom hints at the vulnerability and partial naivety of the speaker in contrast to how the old man still walks “Firm and upright” (25) though he is aged and worn. Yet, in the beginning, the old man’s eyes only “*seemed* true” to the young man, thus further blurring if it is better to guard oneself completely, like the old man, or engage openly with the world, like the young man (6, *emph. added*).

In both ways of addressing hate and love, there is no clear answer, but rather each man is driven by his inner desires and view of the world. So similarly Wood identifies Love as “the dear controller of our will” (12) and overall characterizes these abstract virtues as fabrications of man that we nonetheless must “cling to still” (9) in order to find genuine meaning and fulfillment in the world. Wood emphasizes how these virtues are all “god[s] to serve” that we must recognize and pursue, just like both the old man and young man have pursued their chosen gods.

Ransom depicts a duality in worldviews in this poem, although not explicitly religious. But the issue of how one understands the world and interacts with it can be taken as spiritual in nature itself. “Old Man Pondered” almost becomes an example of Wood’s Sonnet 85 in action, in how it presents two ways of living out these created abstract virtues. Wood utilizes the sonnet form’s strict parameters to explore this abstract topic and Ransom employs iambic pentameter

with an unusual but consistent rhyme scheme in octaves to present his views. Both utilize form and lyricism to explore more surreal and spiritual subject matter, which helps to provide grounding to these metaphysical ideas.

Returning to the South Agrarians as a whole, religion was a major influence and issue as the South was pushed to modernize. Davis notes how “Southern religious fundamentalism enforced strict adherence to literal interpretations of scripture and rigid conformity to social mores” (101) and that there was a general resurgence of traditional religious values and emphasis during this time. However, both Wood and Ransom seemed to diverge from this adherence to traditional religious dogma, especially Wood, who denounced generally all organized religion. Furthermore, the emphasis on “centrality of spiritual truth, formal beauty, love of nature, and the importance of community into general principles of literary judgement” that Matthews in his chapter explains stemmed from Ransom and other South Agrarian’s ‘New Criticism’ also seems to be present in this and other of Wood’s work (117). Wood was generally critical of traditional southern values and concepts, and condemned the south’s continued emphasis on past issues, but he was nonetheless influenced by his homeland and the literary methods developed out of the South during this period between the 1920s and 1940s.

## **VII. “Tomorrow grows within today” (105)**

In terms of the current study, I understand Clement Wood to be an outlier writer of the 20th century who lived and worked in multiple traditions and ideologies. A notable critic, lecturer, professor, and poet, Wood challenged and critiqued literary characteristics, fellow writers, and political-social issues alike. He was unsparingly open in his views and opinions on

any subject, from meritable poetry to moral action, and, as a result grew as many adversaries as he did supporters, which may have contributed to his lack of current literary attention.

His poetry centers around three major themes, the natural, social, and spiritual, which Wood develops and discusses in a style shaped by all three aforementioned movements and his individual experiences during the sixty years of his life. As a historical influence, Wood's main similarity to American Romanticism is seen in his use of colloquial speech and attention to human interaction with the natural world; he diverges from this movement mainly by stemming away from the lyric mode toward a poetic ideology centered in human experience.

As for Modernism, overall Wood shares a modernist focus on the reimagining of poetry's relationship to historical and social processes (Ayers), and differs most notably in his critique of the main modernist experimental styles of poetry in favor of a more traditional and formal style. In regard to the South Agrarians, Wood is an example of Suarez's observation that "Southern poets did not participate in the major contemporary movements" (78) on the whole. Like many Southern writers, Wood grappled with the increasing urbanization and industry in the rural, agricultural south. But Wood nonetheless strayed away from the overall Southern Renaissance attention to reaffirming old southern values and concepts and was majorly critical of the south's social, political, and religious history.

If it is true what Ayers says that "We might well regard as modernist any poetry which refuses to accept its place in history" (26), then I would go ahead and mark Wood down as a Modernist. However, in exploring his poetry, I do not think he regarded himself as such. Throughout my research, Wood's connections to Modernism, South Agrarians, and American Romanticism are present, but not concrete in any one way. In light of this, I would like to conclude, not that Clement Wood expresses a unique poetic style all on his own, but rather that,

like many writers, he was influenced by and adhered to multiple literary styles, such that he cannot be rooted down in one specific tradition.

Furthermore, during my research, because I had the opportunity to visit the Clement Wood Collection located at Brown University, I was able to gain a larger and more in-depth viewpoint on Wood's literary and personal life. As I went through the boxes and folders of correspondence, articles, and photos, donated by his first wife Mildred Cummer, I discovered more of his connections to the American literary scene: he founded with his second wife Gloria Goddard a school of writing at his home, the 'Bozenkill School of Creative Writing,' as well as served as president and helped found the 'Poetry Institute of America.' He was a widely known lecturer on literary, social, political, and philosophical topics and presented and taught at many schools around the New England area and in the South. He corresponded with many major 20th century writers, as mentioned at various times above, and strove to follow his beliefs in human emotion and appreciation of the natural world.

Though I was not able to incorporate the extent of Brown's collection in my current analysis, the existence of this collection has opened up countless doors into the life and work of Clement Wood for future research. By utilizing the material at Brown, not only can I, or other scholars, reveal more details about Wood's connection to Modernism and the Southern Renaissance, but we can also begin to put together a fuller picture of Wood as an American writer. Brown's collection will play a vital role on future study of Clement Wood and those around him and can help to reach a more final conclusion on Wood's supposed literary fit.

That there is even a collection at the John Hay Library at Brown University suggests to me that sometimes as the years passed by other relatives, and perhaps scholars and writers, rediscovered Clement Wood, as I too have done. The Clement Wood Collection at Brown,

totaling nearly 40 boxes, is vital to any continued scholarship on Wood and those surrounding him, like his writerly grandfather W.C. Richardson, aunt Belle R. Harrison, and both his wives, Mildred Cummer and Gloria Goddard. The information there can provide a clearer picture of Wood's literary movement as well as help to better explain both his lack of scholarly attention and his worth to American literature. In moving forward, with the use of the collection at Brown, I will continue researching not just Wood's literary merit, but his social and philosophical importance as well in order to bring about increased scholarship and attention to him and his work, which I take to be an important but undiscussed contribution to 20th century American literature as a whole.

Returning one final time to his autobiography, *The Glory Road*, Wood recognizes that "I am a minor poet, even among living American singers" but that it "does not trouble me," rather, he is satisfied in simply having "honestly said the concentrated emotional utterance that was in my own heart, at some length, and with some singing skill" (286). That Wood was aware of his own 'minorness,' gives some explanation as to his lack of scholarship or remembrance in the modern era. But even so, he believed in the value of his poetic work, and gave the term "Wandersoul" to his view of himself as free in human love and emotion and born out of the natural world to write of these things (*Glory Road* 139). But regardless of the arguable level of importance of Wood to 20th century American literature, for Wood himself, in his autobiography, he simply asks:

Let me be remembered or forgot as one who curiously wed the revirginal earth, leaving her of more worth; leaving her inordinately cherried still; one of hot will who relished all he tasted; one who crooned like a sky starred and mooned; one who knew that life was a



road to death, and gave all his breath to saying that life was, not good, not bad, but all he ever had (*The Glory Road* 220).

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## IX. Appendix of Poems

## "Green Leaves," Clement Wood.

## GREEN LEAVES

*For Clara Ellen Swartz*

## I.

We slid out of the street-locked park,—  
 A rolling, curving stretch of wood  
 May-odorous, and proudly green,—  
 Into cleft streets, whose bricked walls stood  
 In stolid death, as our machine  
 Skidded and righted, like some dark  
 Low-flying creature, fleeing a shout.  
 We wound and swirled and bent about,  
 Yet still the oddly scattered trees  
 Watched us, in curious disdain. . . .  
 And then we found a park again,  
 And a triumphant horde of these  
 Green guardians of green mysteries.

Out of the green—into the green—  
 And all the bricked-up blocks between  
 Blurred to a dulling monochrome:  
 Here was our first and our last home.

## II.

We saw trees watch us, as we sped  
 Through bricked streets dying or already dead.

## GREEN LEAVES

They were on silent sentry go,  
 Coolly watching the human foe.  
 Stiffly and silently, as we sped,  
 They watched with their green eyes overhead.

## III.

High on a hill, as we swept by,  
 We saw green trees buttress the sky,  
 Stiff and terrible and high,  
 And in no human way serene.  
 The sky was gray, but the living sheen  
 Tortured our eyes. And then the keen  
 Unsparing sun flung his aureole  
 Around each rooted living soul. . . .  
 We scarce dared look upon the whole,  
 So painfully, passionately green.  
 But one shade brighter, and those high  
 Green flames would burn the tortured sky.

## IV.

Circling the city's tree-cleared space  
 The forests peer with covetous face,  
 The forests creep with wolfish pace,  
 Faltering, wily, and yet elate.

GREEN LEAVES

There in their pride they crouch and wait,  
A green-eyed ring of wolves, who slay  
The night-bound straggler for their prey. . . .  
Closer and closer they inch their way.

v.

You think a park is a fenced and clipped  
Body of tree clones, manacled tight?  
They will march free on their own night.  
See how one venturesome root has gripped  
And twisted the pavement's concrete mass,  
Forcing a widening crevasse.  
See how the grass between the bricks  
Worries them with its gradual tricks.  
See how the slow boughs reach an arm  
Over the fence to things forbidden;  
And the white roots keep up a hidden  
Endless restlessness, groping their harm.

The seasons crowd with muffled tread;  
Man will abandon the brick-walled street. . . .  
The trees' triumph will be complete.  
The staid blank walls will be engraved  
With what the ivy creepers plaited;

GREEN LEAVES

There will be life where all is dead,  
Life, green life, tangled and matted.  
Tearing apart what man has paved,  
Strange new shoots will force their way:  
Life, green life, will conquer the clay.

v.

What are we  
But leaves of a tree,  
Pallid, fluttering leaves of a tree,  
Whited and thinned,  
Flung by the wind,  
Torn and freed by the scattering wind,  
Treading, and trod  
By man and god  
Into our mother and grave, the sod?

vi.

Before man was, the patient trees  
Greened in the Spring, dulled in the fall.  
And after us, their vivid shawl  
Will cover the nude brown limbs of earth.  
Their slavery to man is brief—  
They will come back to the free mirth

*GREEN LEAVES*

Of unhedged stem and unclipped leaf,  
Over the earth in triumph running,  
Glowing green victory. Man sees  
The gradual surge, and builds him poor  
Oases of brick and stone and plaster—  
But in the end the green is master.  
And when man's hand has lost its cunning,  
In some unguessed untimed disaster,  
He shall lie and see the slow serene  
Onward march of the army of green—  
See soil and sky, and nothing between  
But the endless sweep of the joyous green.



**“After Apple Picking,” Robert Frost.**

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree  
Toward heaven still,  
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple-picking now.  
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,  
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.  
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight  
I got from looking through a pane of glass  
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough  
And held against the world of hoary grass.  
It melted, and I let it fall and break.  
But I was well  
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,  
And I could tell  
What form my dreaming was about to take.  
Magnified apples appear and disappear,  
Stem end and blossom end,  
And every fleck of russet showing clear.  
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,  
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.  
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.  
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin  
The rumbling sound  
Of load on load of apples coming in.  
For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking: I am overtired  
Of the great harvest I myself desired.  
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.  
For all  
That struck the earth,  
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,  
Went surely to the cider-apple heap  
As of no worth.  
One can see what will trouble  
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.  
Were he not gone,  
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his  
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,  
Or just some human sleep.

**“Water-lilies,” Sarah Teasdale.**

If you have forgotten water lilies floating  
On a dark lake among mountains in the afternoon shade,  
If you have forgotten their wet, sleepy fragrance,  
Then you can return and not be afraid.

But if you remember, then turn away forever  
To the plains and the prairies where pools are far apart,  
There you will not come at dusk on closing water lilies,  
And the shadow of mountains will not fall on your heart.

"Smithy of God," Clement Wood.

THE SMITHY OF GOD

I.

*(A bold, masculine chant.)*

I am Newark, forger of men,  
~~Forger of men, forger of men—~~  
 Here at a smithy God wrought, and flung  
 Earthward, down to this rolling shore,  
 God's mighty hammer I have swung,  
 With crushing blows that thunder and roar,  
 And delicate taps, whose echoes have rung  
 Softly to heaven and back again;  
 Here I labor, forging men.  
 Out of my smithy's smoldering hole,  
 As I forge a body and mold a soul,  
 The jangling clangors ripplewise roll.

*(The voice suggests the noises of the city.)*

Clang, as a hundred thousand feet  
 Tap-tap-tap down the morning street,  
 And into the mills and factories pour,  
 Like a narrowed river's breathing roar.

Clang, as two thousand whistles scream  
 Their seven-in-the-morning's burst of steam,

THE SMITHY OF GOD

Brass-throated sirens, calling folk  
 To the perilous breakers of din and smoke.

Clang, as ten thousand vast machines  
 Pound and pound, in their pulsed routines,  
 Throbbing and stunning, with deafening beat,  
 The tiny humans lost at their feet.

Clang, and the whistle and whirr of trains,  
 Rattle of ships unleashed of their chains,  
 Fire-gongs, horse-trucks' jolts and jars,  
 Traffic-calls, milk-carts, droning cars. . . .

*(A softer strain.)*

Clang, and a softer shiver of noise  
 As school-bells summon the girls and boys;  
 And a mellower tone, as the churches ring  
 A people's reverent worshiping.

*(Still more softly and drowsily, the last line whis-  
 pered.)*

Clang, and clang, and clang, and clang,  
 Till a hundred thousand tired feet  
 Drag-drag-drag down the evening street,  
 And gleaming the <sup>myriad</sup> ~~myriad~~ street-lights hang;

## THE SMITHY OF GOD

The far night-noises dwindle and hush,  
 The city quiets its homing rush;  
 The stars glow forth with a silent sweep,  
 As hammer and hammered drowse asleep . . .  
 Softly I sing to heaven again,  
 I am Newark, forger of men,  
 Forger of men, forger of men.

## II.

*(Antichorus, with restrained bitterness, and notes  
 of wailing and sorrow.)*

You are Newark, forger of men,  
 Forger of men, forger of men. . . .  
 You take God's children, and forge a race  
 Unhuman, exhibiting hardly a trace  
 Of Him and His loveliness in their face. . . .  
 Counterfeiting His gold with brass,  
 Blanching the roses, scorching the grass,  
 Filling with hatred and greed the whole,—  
 Shriveling the body, withering the soul.

What have you done with the lift of youth,  
 As they bend in the mill, and bend in the mill?  
 Where have you hidden beauty and truth,  
 As they bend in the mill?

## THE SMITHY OF GOD

Where is the spirit seeking the sky,  
 As they stumble and fall, stumble and fall?  
 What is life, if the spirit die,  
 As they stumble and fall?

*(With bitter resignation.)*

Clang, and the strokes of your hammer grind  
 Body and spirit, courage and mind;  
 Smith of the devil, well may you be  
 Proud of your ghastly forgery.  
 Dare you to speak to heaven again,  
 Newark, Newark, forger of men,  
 Forger of men, forger of men?

## III.

*(Beginning quietly, gathering certainty.)*

I am Newark, forger of men,  
 Forger of men, forger of men.  
 Well I know that the metal must glow  
 With a scorching, searing heat;  
 Well I know that blood must flow,  
 And floods of sweat, and rivers of woe;  
 That underneath the beat  
 Of the hammer, the metal will writhe and toss;  
 That there will be much and much of loss

THE SMITHY OF GOD

That has to be sacrificed,  
Before I can forge body and soul  
That can stand erect and perfect and whole  
In the sight of Christ.

*(Sadly and somberly.)*

My hammer is numb to sorrows and aches,  
My hammer is blind to the ruin it makes,  
My hammer is deaf to shriek and cry  
That ring till they startle water and sky.

And sometimes with me the vision dims  
At the sight of bent backs and writhing limbs;  
And sometimes I blindly err, and mistake  
The perfect glory I must make.

*(Rising to a song of exultant triumph.)*

But still I labor and bend and toil,  
Shaping anew the stuff I spoil;  
And out of the smothering din and grime  
I forge a city for all time:  
A city beautiful and clean,  
With wide sweet avenues of green,  
With gracious homes and houses of trade,  
Where souls as well as things are made.

THE SMITHY OF GOD

I forge a people fit to dwell  
Unscathed in the hottest heart of hell,  
And fit to shine, erect and straight,  
When we shall see His kingdom come  
On earth, over all of Christendom,—  
And I stand up, shining and great,  
Lord of an unforeseen estate.  
Then I will cry, and clearly then,  
I am Newark, forger of men.

**“Eagle Sonnet 20,” Clement Wood.**

Not like an evergreen, whose somber shade  
 alters neither for summer noon nor ice,  
 but faces, imperturbable, the blade  
 of autumn, or spring’s passionate Paradise,  
 I yield my leafage to the rummaging storm,  
 I loose my little lives to the snow’s chill.  
 And when summoning April shouts its warm  
 greeting, I flame like green dawn over the hill.  
 And my chameleon heart will lift its hue  
 to yours, O soil on which my soul is fed,  
 although you veer from dawn-red and noon-blue  
 to midnight blackness. So be comforted;  
     for our two hearts will mate like glowing birds  
     in more than the sweet blossoming of words.

**“Eagle Sonnet 48,” Clement Wood.**

And tonight again I have sent him down to you--  
 this casual lover whom you cherish so,  
 that you may give yourself to him permanently,  
 leaving me memory’s residue....  
 I have sent him down to you--it was your will.  
 For two slow hours I will sit quietly  
 and try to forget this tight unforgettable hell  
 I and you have built on earth for me.  
 Grant that I did it gracefully--with a smile,  
 as if I’d regained your handkerchief dropped to the ground.  
 At least, I meet defeat with a hint of style.  
 Only in these words have I underlined  
     the little silent cup of agony  
     that came so overwhelmingly to me.

**“Chicago,” Carl Sandburg.**

Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
 Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;  
 Stormy, husky, brawling,  
 City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the  
 gas lamps luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and  
 go free to kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have  
 seen the marks of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them  
 back the sneer and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and  
 strong and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid  
 against the little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the  
 wilderness,

Bareheaded,

Shoveling,

Wrecking,

Planning,

Building, breaking, rebuilding,

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the  
 people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog  
 Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the

Nation. Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,

Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;

Stormy, husky, brawling,

City of the Big Shoulders:

**“The Road,” Conrad Aiken.**

Three then came forward out of darkness, one  
 An old man bearded, his old eyes red with weeping,  
 A peasant, with hard hands. “Come now,” he said,  
 “And see the Road, for which our people die.  
 Twelve miled of road we’ve made, a little only,  
 Westward winding. Of human blood and stone  
 We build; and in a thousand years will come  
 Beyond the hills to sea.”

I went with them,  
 Taking a lantern, which upon their faces  
 Showed years and grief; and in a time we came  
 To the wild road which wound among wild hills  
 Westward; and so along this road we stopped,  
 Silent, thinking of all the dead men there  
 Compounded with sad clay. Slowly we moved:  
 For they were old and weak, had given all  
 Their life to build this twelve poor miled of road,  
 Muddy, under the rain. And in my hand,  
 Turning the lantern here or there, I saw  
 Deep holes of water where the raindrop splashed,  
 And rainfilled footprints in the grass, and heaps  
 Of broken stone, and rused spades and picks,  
 And helms of axes. And the old man spoke,  
 Holding my wrist: “Three hundred years it took  
 To build these miles of road: three hundred years;  
 And human lives unnumbered. But the day  
 Will come when it is done.” Then spoke another,  
 One not so old, but old, whose face was wrinkled:  
 “And when it comes, our people will all sing  
 For joy, passing from east to west, or west  
 To east, returning, with the light behind them;  
 All meeting in the road and singing there.”  
 And the third said: “The road will be their life;  
 A heritage of blood. Grief will be in it,  
 And beauty out of grief. And i can see  
 How all the women’s faces will be bright.  
 In that time, laughing, they will remember us.  
 Blow out your lantern now, for day is coming.”

My lantern blown out, in a little while  
 We climbed in long light up a hill, where climbed  
 The dwindling road, and ended in a field.  
 Peasants were working in the field, bowed down  
 With unrewarded work and grief and years



Of pain. And as we passed them, one man fell  
 Into a furrow that was bright with water  
 And gave a cry that was half cry half song--  
 "The road...the road...the road..." And all then fell  
 Upon their knees and sang.

We four passed on  
 Over the hills, to westward....Then I felt  
 How tears ran down my face, tears without end,  
 And knew that all my life henceforth was weeping,  
 Weeping, thinking of human grief and human  
 Endeavor fruitless in a world of pain.  
 And when I held my hands up they were old;  
 I knew my face would not be young again.

**"Eagle Sonnet 78," Clement Wood.**

And this is how--now let me speak it out--  
 I see, and know, and live. I do not hold  
 a firm belief in god--not even a doubt;  
 only a knowledge, as my words have told,  
 that he is not, and never was. And as  
 to man, I hold that more is wrong with him than  
 the scantest right. --That this deficiency has  
 grown greater, as the years have faltered on.  
 And that all signs and probabilities  
 Point to a fate for him grimmer and blacker  
 than the most pessimistic philosophies  
 have indicated. And that its date come quicker.  
     Man is a plant, once sound, now subtly rotting;  
     and, after that, why, simply nothing.

**"Eagle Sonnet 85," Clement Wood.**

Faith is the dream that things known false are true.  
 Truth is our feeble vision in the dark.  
 Love, that supremest pleasure men pursue,  
 is life's device to shield an undimmed spark.  
 Right is a thing of person and of season;  
 justice, the sagging of a rusty scale'  
 and we need only watch the cheater, reason,  
 to see how man's last anchorage must fail.  
 Faith is a vision we must cling to still.  
 Truth is a god to serve, although we die.  
 Love is the dear controller of our will.

Justice and right must ring in every cry.  
Though reason let our craft drift out to sea,  
we shall not find a truer guide than he.

**“O Virtuous Light,” Elinor Wylie.**

A private madness has prevailed  
Over the pure and valiant mind;  
The instrument of reason failed  
And the star-gazing eyes struck blind.

Sudden excess of light has wrought  
Confusion in the secret place  
Where the slow miracles of thought  
Take shape through patience into grace.

Mysterious as steel and flint  
The birth of this destructive spark  
Whose inward growth has power to print  
Strange suns upon the natural dark.

O break the walls of sense in half  
And make the spirit fugitive!  
This light begotten of itself  
Is not a light by which to live!

The fire of farthing tallow dips  
Dispels the menace of the skies  
So it illuminate the lips  
And ender the discerning eyes.

O virtuous light, if thou be man's  
Or matter of the meteor stone,  
Prevail against this radiance  
Which is engendered of its own!

**“Let No Charitable Hope,” Elinor Wylie.**

Now let no charitable hope  
Confuse my mind with images  
Of eagle and of antelope;  
I am in nature none of these.

I was, being human, born along;

I am, being woman, hard beset;  
I live by squeezing from a stone  
The little nourishment I get.

In masks outrageous and austere  
The years go by in a single file;  
But non has merited my fear,  
And none has quite escaped my smile.

**“Old Man Pondered,” John Crowe Ransom.**

Three times he crossed our way where with me went  
One who is fair and gentle, and it was strange,  
But not once glancing did his vision range  
Wayward on me, or my most innocent,  
But strictly watched his own predicament.  
How are old spirits so dead? His eye seemed true  
As mine, he walked by it, it was as blue,  
How came it monstered in its fixed intent?

But I will venture how. In his long years  
Close-watched and dangerous, many a bright-barbed hate  
Burning had smote against the optic gate  
To enter and destroy. But the quick gears  
Blinked shut the aperture. Else those grim leers  
Has won to the inner chamber where sat Hope  
To spin and pray, and made her misanthrope,  
And bled her courage with a thousand spears.

Thus hate and scorn. And he must guard as well  
Against alluring love, whose mild engine  
Was perilous too for the lone sitter-in,  
So hard consented to her little cell;  
The tenderest looks vainly upon him fell,  
Of dearest company, lest one light arrow  
Be sharpened with a most immortal sorrow.  
So he had kept his mansion shut of hell.

Firm and upright he walked for one so old,  
Thrice-pondered; and i dare not prophesy  
What age must bring me; for I look round bold  
And seek my enemies out; and leave untold  
The sideway watery dog's-glances I  
Send fawning on you, thinking you will not scold.