

The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS



New York
Nocturnes

By Arthur Stringer

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ARTHUR STRINGER was born in 1874 in Chatham, Ontario, and educated at London Collegiate Institute, the University of Toronto, and later at Oxford University, England. After a time on the staff of the *Montreal Herald*, he went, at the invitation of the American Press Association, to New York where he spent many years writing the poetry and the stories for which he has become famous.

The Ryerson Poetry *Chapbooks*

New York Nocturnes

By Arthur Stringer



THE CITY

She, with her wounds and emptying veins, may dream
Of creeping death, yet laughs through pain and ruth,
Her thinning blood made richer by that stream
Of gladly-given plasma known as Youth.

THE GEESE GO NORTH

High in the blue the wild geese arrow on
And break the crystal silence with their call
That spells unrest and old remembered springs.
Dark in the dusk and silver in the dawn
The far wedge floats, the pinions rise and fall
As azure space is scythed by eager wings.
And I who hear those bugling throats above
These hills that are no longer home to me
Must follow after them, must now go forth
And seek the lake-lands that I know and love,
The pine-dark ridge, the rivers running free,
The blue-domed silence of the brooding North.

THE ELMS AT THE PLAZA

(*Rockefeller Center*)

Brought helpless from some outland home,
And barred as in a cage,
Through steel-grilled beds of gardener's loam
They now seek anchorage.

The winds of spring blow never sweet
Between their straitened boles;
The only stream that laves their feet
Are spates of restless souls.

The sound that through their leafage steals
Is never a white-throat's song;
They only hear man's heartless wheels
Where haste and madness throng.

But still past sterile iron and stone
They grope to Mother Earth
And seek the breast they must have known
And reached for at their birth.

*And I, who knew a world afar
Where life more richly ran,
Here seem to lose some happier star
For a city made of man.*

CHRISTMAS-TREES IN WEST STREET

(*Dark and true and tender is the North.—Caedman*)

I pass where the pines for Christmas
Stand thick in the crowded street,
Where the groves of Dream and Silence
Are paced by feverish feet.

And far through the rain and the street-cries
My homesick heart goes forth
To the pine-clad hills of childhood,
To the dark and tender North.

And I see the blue-green pinelands
And I thrill to the northland cold
Where the sunset falls in silence
On the hills of gloom and gold.

And the still dusk woods close round me,
And I know the waiting eyes
Of the North, like a child's, are tender,
As a sorrowing mother's, wise.

THE POET IN BATTERY PARK

We walk Time's crowded shore and day by day
Weave idle dreams and with still childish hands
Enscroll our foolish markings on the sands,
And tide by tide our work seems washed away.

While they who live by labour, they whose fame
Rests not on fruitless song but on that strife
Whence come these solid walls and towers of life,
In lordly granite leave a lasting name.

These toil-built walls, they say, live after us
Who idly sing—and yet, beyond their ken,
Past crumbling towers and tombs, song-hungry men
Still listen to a lost Theocritus.

THE JERSEY MEADOWS

Dry reeds and rustling grasses wave
Amid the wintry cold;
The low sun bathes the city towers
In a tawny wash of gold.

Smoke-plumed, a phantom local drifts
Across a rush-lined floor
And melts into a hidden cave
On the Hudson's terraced shore.

The dusk creeps down where waving sedge
Moves like a quiet breast,
And homebound toilers leave behind
Their island of unrest,

And peace, beside the river's gloom
Where banked lights come to life,
Still frames and holds in quiet arms
Man's fevered walls of strife.

NIGHT CLUB IN WAR-TIME

They are not glad; their youth is gone,
Yet here, to lethal staves,
They dream they are not standing on
A thousand distant graves.

Wine-flushed, they swarm and sing and joke
Along the chromium bar,
And the smoke they breathe is not the smoke
Of battlefields afar.

But, spurning terrors best forgot
Where gin for plasma runs,
They hear the throb of brass, and not
The throb of belching guns.

They dance and rest and watch and yawn
And from night's quickened pace
Store up pale joy against the dawn
They stand too sad to face,

Since they are prisoners who pine
At feasts that leave them thin;
With grief that sours their sweetest wine,
With hemlock in their gin.

Life, life they ask, at any cost,
But loud their doom is read:
*They in their gladness are the lost,
The wounded, and the dead!*

THE LOVER IN THE SUBWAY

Builded of stone and steel they stand, the pride of our puny age;
Inlaid with granite and iron they run, the roads of our hurrying
 rage,
Arrogant cliffs of wonder and arroyos lamped with flame—
But each at the breath of Time shall vanish the way it came.

Bridges across dark waters, tunnels beneath the earth,
These shall be swept away as though they had known no birth
And the roofs and the marbled walls melt down to the waiting
 dust
And the turrets of stone be tumbled and the glories of steel be
 rust.

Cobweb and gossamer they, that the centuries brush aside
Where the eagle will build her nest in their pinnacled lofts of
 pride,
And the serpent along the street-curb and the grass in the empty
 square
Will give scant thought of the glory lost hands once fashioned
 there.

But out of the ruins one thing must triumph and live, My Own,
And that is our love, our deathless love, surviving all metal and
 stone;
Though cities go out like candles, though rivers dry up like dew,
Over the tombs of Time will echo my timeless cry for You.

*Yet, here in the Subway murk, where the flailing wheels strike fire,
I wonder if men loved women in the time-lost streets of Tyre,
If a breast as soft as your breast and a heart as warm with trust
Can sleep but a drift of dust now under Cydonia's dust?*

THE SEEING-EYE DOG

I watched the dog that patient-eyed
Led on a sightless man
Grown glad to trust a silent guide
Where life so loudly ran.

Alert that leader of the blind
Explored the crowded street,
And, wise and voiceless, sought to find
A path for sightless feet.

Alert he saw the red turn green,
Then wove a tenuous way
Amid the wheels that purred between
The stop-lights' steady play.

And I who tread life's darkling maze
With no such silent friend,
And grope across Time's tangled ways
And cannot see the end—

I ask that some mute faith of mine
May guide me to that goal
Where long-awaited light may shine
On man's long-blinded soul.

MIDNIGHT IN WALL STREET

A curving lane of quietude
Their midday spate has grown
Where peace and pallid shadows brood
On windowed cliffs of stone.

The tumult of too fevered hours
Is lost in dusk and sleep
Where silence crowns the sullen towers
And night reigns doubly deep.

For they who sought the golden fleece
Have now foregone the quest;
Their maelstrom is a thing of peace,
Their mart a place of rest.

And where each grim wall skyward gropes
As slumber softens life,
It stands the grave of buried hopes,
The tomb of ghostly strife.

ROBIN IN GRAMERCY PARK

It flutes in the fading twilight,
It calls through the ghost-like trees,
And quick brings back my mothering North
And the balm of a pineland breeze.

Afar from the city's tumult
Where Spring so emptily wakes
It carries me back to the balsam scent
And the breath of the plunging Lakes.

That note through the dusty twilight
Takes me out to a home of old
Where the afterglow on the pine-dark hills
Hung a tranquil crown of gold.

And the city becomes a ghost-land
With its ghostly years of strife
And the flute of a bird proclaims that peace
Is the final gift of life.

THE ART GALLERY AT DUSK

I lingered where the fading light
Fell ghostly on the gilded frames,
The painted faces touched with night,
The kings with half-forgotten names.

I stood where dusk and silence fell
On princes lost in robe and lace,
On lips of some long-vanished belle,
Some solemn burgher's shadowed face.

And calm before my questing gaze,
In marbled sleep, white Venus stood,
The treasured dream of far-off days
Men called perfected womanhood.

*But you, the living, breathing you,
Stepped close to where I mused alone;
And ghost-like all mere pictures grew
And Venus stood a block of stone.*

THE PENGUIN AT THE PLAZA

Where the turrets of steel and granite
Loom dark in the smoke-dulled sky
The penguin, poised on the fountain's rim,
Sent forth one dolorous cry.

The questioning cry of a sea-bird
In a rookery not its own,
That echoed up to the idling throng
And the terraced walls of stone.

A faltering cry for the ice-fields
Where the tundra meets the tide
And a low sun gilds the polar dunes
And the green-white icebergs ride.

*And we mortals who heard that lone cry
Awaken and waver and climb,
We too took thought of some ghostly Home
Now lost in the mists of Time.*

SPIDER UNDER BROOKLYN BRIDGE

I weave my silvered netting, thread by thread,
Silk-like and tremulous in shadowed air,
Small in this wider weaving overhead
Where thunder rolls and restless mortals fare.

From me they may have learned of strain and stress,
The woof that meets the warp and binds the net,
The tissued film that floats in nothingness
And leaves the tenuous cables firmly set.

I do not know; the ways of man are dim,
Who laughs at space and marries land to land.
*Mayhap some wider bridge towers over him
With weavings he's too small to understand.*

NIGHT RAIN ON BROADWAY

Where deep the lamp-strewn canyon twines
Past shadowy tower and wall
Starred bright with bulbs and neon signs
Warm rain began to fall.

A sudden shower fell softly through
Their night that was not night
Where pavement pools of silvered blue
Flung back the scattered light.

The toil-worn curb became a brook
That rippled as it ran;
The square took on the empty look
Of lands unknown to man.

Where misted globes of red and green
Blinked restless through the rain
Their roadway of unrest lay clean
As a tree-lined country lane.

And April freshness touched the soul
Of all night's huddled throng
As down their wearied valley stole
Rain's lyric wash of song.

THE AVENUE IN WAR-TIME

I watch their women come and go
Along the street where flags still swing
And gowns instead of tulips glow
And hats instead of robins sing.
I see them seek their nylon hose
And scarfs as flimsy as a song
And slips as fragile as a rose;
And as they idly wander by
I see above that queenly throng
The old indifferent April sky.

But half a troubled world away
In blackened towns where shrilling planes
Sweep over tortured homes and spray
Quick death instead of April rains,
Gaunt women, groping through a pall
Of dust and smoke, go grim of brow
From rubbled heap to tumbled wall,
And in torn rooms where beams are piled
And all they prized is vanished now,
They dig to find a battered child.

PIGEON FEEDER IN BRYANT PARK

His life as faded as his coat,
He leans across his cane
And views each iridescent throat
That seeks his scattered grain.

Despite the frugal days he lives
He flouts greed's ancient law,
And reigns a king, and kingly gives
To fill a pigeon's crow.

Since his starved heart pale solace wrings
From hunger thus appeased
He in the midst of fluttering wings
Finds ghostlier hungers eased.

And sitting placid in the sun,
He hears the muted sound
Of moiling souls who blindly shun
The bird-like peace he's found.

EAST-SIDE TEACHER

Behind her ink-stained desk, as on a bridge
Above a deck of upturned eyes,
She sits the captain of a noisy crew
That little cares where Knowledge lies.

Adroit, discreet, her sternness but a mask
To leave her mistress of tumultuous youth,
She trims the sails of discipline and steers
The devious course that leads to Truth.

Staid watcher of soft growth still April-small,
She, from the calm that Autumns bring,
Sees life reborn in yearly bursts of bloom
And old despairs made glad with Spring.

And sensing from the bud the open flower,
She guards those petals half-unfurled,
And in a casual hand made white with chalk
She holds and molds the coming world.

TO A CERTAIN MILLIONAIRE

"Much treasure will be mine when once I yield
This Sabine horde my City," darkly mused
Tarpeia of the Gate,
"Much wealth of precious stone and golden shield."
Rome fell to them,—this many a year was writ
The story of her fate
And how, for thanks, they flung their gold till bruised
And broken she lay dying under it.

So you, who gave long years to seek success,
You who betrayed that guarded citadel
Where burns life's inner flame,
Forgetting all that is not bought or sold
And planning only how to onward press,
Are given what you claim,
And crowned at last by what you love so well
Lie smothered in your million bits of gold!

ARAN GIRL ON ELLIS ISLAND

She waits unwelcomed in the crowded room
That seems too sordid for a Door of Hope,
Her sea-grey eyes untouched with doubt or gloom,
Her old-world wealth a bundle tied with rope.

The young breast mounded under rustic frieze
May house new wonderments, but never fear,
As grim, untamed, she flairs the harbour breeze
And views the fabled towers that loom so near.

Yet half defiant, though forlorn, she feels
Scant terror at the land of toil and gold
So far from curraghs and from salty creels
And fog-draped islands that are dour and old.

For through her flows the blood of sea-cubbed men
Who warred and sang and roamed the Outer Isles
And heard the warning drums from glen to glen
And the call of pipes across embattled kyles.

The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books

Lorne Pierce—Editor

Number

1. THE SWEET O' THE YEAR* [1925]
70. THE THOUSAND ISLANDS
81. REWARD AND OTHER POEMS
89. CALLING ADVENTURERS!
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95. AT SUMMER'S END
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118. WHEN THIS TIDE EBBS
120. V-E DAY
121. THE FLOWER IN THE DUSK
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101. BIRDS BEFORE DAWN
102. HEARING A FAR CALL
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