

**POEMS. WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION BY  
PADRAIC COLUM**

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Poems. With an Introduction by Padraic Colum by Gladys Cromwell

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# POEMS

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GLADYS CROMWELL

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PADRAIC COLUM

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Thanks are due to the Editor of *Poetry* for courteous permission to reprint "The Fugitive," "The Crowning Gift," "Folded Power," "The Mould," "Autumn Communion" and "Star Song"; also to the Editor of *The New Republic* for "Winter Landscape" and "Words," and to the *Sunwise Turn* for "The Scientist."

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## INTRODUCTION TO GLADYS CROMWELL'S POEMS

The poetry of Gladys Cromwell was that of an out-dweller on modern life. In it there are no mannerisms, no novelties. Personality is expressed, but it is not exhibited. It is a poetry that has the accent of actuality, but of an actuality known to a noble heart and a distinguished spirit.

There is nothing facile in these poems. Indeed in certain of them the workmanship is halting and unachieved. But in the poems that are the least fluent there are moments of mastery — moments when the words become alive with spirit. Such a poem as "Conflict" seems to come out of the silence and the dark like a living thing. And there is exquisite achievement in "The Mould," "Folded Power," "Autumn Communion," "Star Song," "Definition," "Dominion," "The Crowning Gift." These are fine lyrics indeed — indubitably amongst the best that has been written in our day.

Amongst many other distinctions this poetry has the distinction of being a woman's poetry.

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I do not mean that it has an obviously feminine interest. Again, one can say that personality is not exhibited. But the perceptions are a woman's perceptions. The eagerness is a woman's eagerness. The renunciations are a woman's renunciations. The wit is a woman's wit. And yet, although it is assuredly a woman's poetry, its balance dips towards thought rather than to emotion. It is a poetry that comes out of impassioned thought. Indeed I think "thought" is the word most often used by Gladys Cromwell. She felt herself bound and laden, but like certain philosophical determinists she knew herself free in meditation and introspection. Out of this free and dearly appreciated thought she made her poems.

In all she wrote there is an attempt to do a difficult thing — to say. What she writes is not a phrase, but a statement. Stripped of rime and rhythm these poems would have the interest of something written in a diary by a clear and a sincere soul. The world was difficult for her, but it was intelligible, as she averred in her poem "The Audience"; and this sense of intelligibility brought her to a deliberate and often to a finely achieved form.

Most of her poems are touched by a tragic vision of life.—



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"Trust not your hopes for all are vain,  
Trust not your happiness and pain,  
Trust not your storehouses of grain,  
Trust not your strength on land or sea,  
Trust not your loves that come and go,  
Trust only the hate of the common foe,  
War is the one reality."

Her songs are to enfold her sorrow "like portions of a mellow sheath." The "age-bent" woman that she once saw lead the herd to pasture is made to typify a resignation that the young poet herself has striven for. She can never be off guard. She is proud that she has had the courage to oppose, and she knows that she has won illumination from conflict.

There was one gay tune, however, that she wrote to triumphantly — the Elizabethan tune. When she struck it she became fluent with beautiful words and imagery.—

As clouds lie in the west,  
My fairest pleasures rest  
In you, their element  
Of being. Loath to die  
They ornament your sky,  
Amassed, magnificent.

The poems she has written to this measure have a smiling detachment.

All that Gladys Cromwell had to say came out of a spiritual experience brooded over and made her own, and elevated by an heroic quality

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of mind. She was steadily moving towards a more perfect achievement and the poems that she wrote in the last years and before the world's trouble drew her away were finer and more assured than those she had previously written. Behind the lines of battle her spirit showed as clearly and as beautifully as it does in her poetry. A year ago the soldiers in the Chalons section were speaking of herself and her sister (two beings indeed with a single soul) as "the Saints." The Government of France recognized their devotion and the worth of their service by the decoration it gave. These sisters were like twin spirits caught into an alien sphere, strangely beautiful and strangely apart, and the heavy and unimaginable weight of the world's agony became too great for them to bear. The one who was the articulate poet has left a triumphant stanza for our thought of them —

I know that we exist,  
Two entities in Time.  
Our vital wills resist  
Enclosing night; our thoughts  
Command a Truth above  
All fear, in knowing Love.

So an Iphigenia might speak in a play by an Euripides of our day.

PADRAIC COLUM.

**LATER POEMS**