Could they return to life? or would they stand
In dancers’ attitudes, puzzled, polite,
And striking vaguely hand on tired hand
For an encore, to fill the ghastly pause?
I do not know. Some rhythm there may be
I cannot hear. But I—oh, I must go
Back where the breakers of deep sunlight roll
Across flat fields that love and touch the sky;
Back to the more of earth, the less of man,
Where there is still a plain simplicity,
And friendship, poor in everything but love,
And faith, unwise, unquestioned, but a star.
Soon now the peace of summer will be there
With cloudy fire of myrtles in full bloom;
And, when the marvelous wide evenings come,
Across the molten river one can see
The misty willow-green of Arcady.
And then—the summer stars... I will go home.

H. D.
1886–1961

Toward the Piraeus

Slay with your eyes, Greek,
men over the face of the earth,
slay with your eyes, the host,
puny, passionless, weak.

Break as the ranks of steel
broke when the Persian lost:
craven, we hated them then:
now we would count them Gods
beside these, spawn of the earth.

Grant us your mantle, Greek:
grant us but one
to fright (as your eyes) with a sword, 
men, craven and weak, 
grant us but one to strike 
one blow for you, passionate Greek.

1.
You would have broken my wings, 
but the very fact that you knew 
I had wings, set some seal 
on my bitter heart, my heart 
broke and fluttered and sang.

You would have snared me, 
and scattered the strands of my nest; 
but the very fact that you saw, 
sheltered me, claimed me, 
set me apart from the rest

Of men—of men, made you a god, 
and me, claimed me, set me apart 
and the song in my breast, 
yours, yours forever— 
if I escape your evil heart.

2.
I loved you: 
men have writ and women have said 
they loved, 
but as the Pythoness stands by the altar, 
intense and may not move, 
till the fumes pass over; 
and may not falter or break, 
till the priest has caught the words 
that mar or make 
a deme or a ravaged town;

so I, though my knees tremble, 
my heart break, 
must note the rumbling, 
heed only the shuddering 
down in the fissure beneath the rock 
of the temple floor;

must wait and watch 
and may not turn nor move,
nor break from my trance to speak
so slight, so sweet,
so simple a word as love.

3.
What had you done
had you been true,
I can not think,
I may not know.

What could we do
were I not wise,
what play invent,
what joy devise?

What could we do
if you were great?

(Yet were you lost,
who were there then,
to circumvent
the tricks of men?)

What can we do,
for curious lies
have filled your heart,
and in my eyes
sorrow has writ
that I am wise.

4.
If I had been a boy,
I would have worshipped your grace,
I would have flung my worship
before your feet,
I would have followed apart,
glad, rent with an ecstasy
to watch you turn
your great head, set on the throat,

thick, dark with its sinews,
burned and wrought
like the olive stalk,
and the noble chin
and the throat

I would have stood,
and watched and watched
and burned,
and when in the night,
from the many hosts, your slaves,
and warriors and serving men
you had turned
to the purple couch and the flame
of the woman, tall like the cypress tree
that flames sudden and swift and free
as with crackle of golden resin
and cones and the locks flung free
like the cypress limbs,
bound, caught and shaken and loosed,
bound, caught and riven and bound
and loosen again,
as in rain of a kingly storm
or wind full from a desert plain.

So, when you had risen
from all the lethargy of love and its heat,
you would have summoned me,
me alone,
and found my hands,
beyond all the hands in the world,
cold, cold, cold,
intolerably cold and sweet.

5.
It was not chastity that made me cold nor fear,
only I knew that you, like myself, were sick
of the puny race that crawls and quibbles and lisps
of love and love and lovers and love’s deceit.

It was not chastity that made me wild, but fear
that my weapon, tempered in different heat,
was over-matched by yours, and your hand
skilled to yield death-blows, might break

With the slightest turn—no ill will meant—
my own lesser, yet still somewhat fine-wrought,
fiery-tempered, delicate, over-passionate steel.

For Bryher and Perdita

They said:
she is high and far and blind
in her high pride,  
but now that my head is bowed  
in sorrow, I find  
she is most kind.

We have taken life, they said,  
blithely, not groped in a mist  
for things that are not—  
are if you will, but bloodless—  
why ask happiness of the dead?  
and my heart bled.

Ah, could they know  
how violets throw strange fire,  
red and purple and gold,  
how they glow  
gold and purple and red  
where her feet tread.

At Baia

I should have thought  
in a dream you would have brought  
some lovely, perilous thing,  
orchids piled in a great sheath,  
as who would say (in a dream)  
I send you this,  
who left the blue veins  
of your throat un Kissed.

Why was it that your hands  
(that never took mine)  
your hands that I could see  
drift over the orchid heads  
so carefully,  
your hands, so fragile, sure to lift  
so gently, the fragile flower stuff—  
ah, ah, how was it

You never sent (in a dream)  
the very form, the very scent,  
not heavy, not sensuous  
but perilous—perilous—  
of orchids, piled in a great sheath,
and folded underneath on a bright scroll
some word:

Flower sent to flower;
for white hands, the lesser white,
less lovely of flower leaf,
or
Lover to lover, no kiss,
no touch, but forever and ever this.

LEONARD BACON
1887–1954

Sonnet on a Portuguese

Eu sou aquelle occulto e grande Cabo.
—Camoens, “Lusiads”

The swarthy fellow, with a Latin smile
And perfect courtesy, led me to the road,
Which I had lost, and other virtue showed
New England has forgotten this long while.
He managed too my fancy to beguile.
In his dark eyes an ancient demon glowed.
Another logic in another mode
Revealed itself in an exotic style.

Henry the Navigator brought him here.
No doubt in dreams he had seen the awful shape
Of the strange spirit of another Cape,
That troubled Diaz with a dubious speech.
That’s why he walked with a rose behind his ear
To dig “quahaugs” on a white South Shore beach.

The Eyes

The eyes are watching you, sharp and shifty,
And you have pondered and you have tried.