

3 Poems for February

by [Esther Cameron](#) (February 2025)



Crows in Winter (N.C. Wyeth, 1941)

Getting Back Into Wordsworth

Dear Wordsworth,

Yestereve (why did we drop
that sweet and economical locution
for our inept "yesterday evening"?),
in the kitchen of a house that seems to wait
unknowing for my father to return,
I read aloud the lines that came to you
beside the "sylvan Wye," where you went roaming
with your "dear sister." Not with ease I read them:
I am a Modern Poet after all,
and such expressions as "wild eyes" awaken

the scoffer who, whether or not we like him,
is well ensconced in all of us these days,
and with him the regretful skeptic, versed
in all we have been told concerning Nature—
“red in tooth and claw,” Tennyson wrote
soon after you. And in me also lives
a disappointed mystic, who when young
desired likewise to be at one with Nature
but always felt a barrier: could never
shake off a tedious self-consciousness.
Moreover, just that day I had perused
some verses of the kind the wise admire
these days, well guarded against any charge
of mush or gush: so much so that at times
they seem devoid of love for any thing
in all the manifest universe, and only
proud of the shrewdness of their unbelief.
Surely their lines and yours cannot be called
by the same name. If one is Poetry,
the other must be something else. Yours have
the prior birthright, theirs the present field.
But theirs I never could have read aloud
to make an evening less desolate.
So on I soldiered, through “sensations sweet,”
through “influence” and “aspect more sublime,”
through a syntactic underbrush that now
and then would open for a blessed moment
upon the clearing of an end-stopped line.
And as I read, yes, I was visited
by “many recollections dim and faint”
shimmering through your scene and your reflections:
I saw again the hill farm which my father
purchased for recreation (which for him
meant a new form of work in which to pour
his endlessly constructing energy):
I saw the house upon the spur, the high
pastures, the paths down through the sandstone bluffs

to the valley where a little nameless stream
meanders, softly purling, overlooked
till recently only by oaks and birches
and by those bluffs. Their faces, scored by strata,
were pages of Earth's immemorial volume
which he had deeply studied, and sometimes
had opened to the wondering ignorant gaze
of a child apt at neither work nor knowledge,
yet capable of awe, that looked back through
his vision at the silent wastes of time
with something of a "natural piety"—
that could not help but trace in rocks and skies
a semblance of his will, sternly exacting
because profoundly kind. For this child only
he also, at rare intervals, took down
one of the small red volumes he had kept
from college days, and pointed in it to
your words. As though he'd had them in his mind,
but like a place seldom revisited.
They would come back to me in that still valley,
where every chance-met flower seemed aware
of some abiding friendship in all things.
In that half-wilderness I came to feel
not "wild ecstasies," but nonetheless
a peace that never came in city limits,
far less upon the outskirts of the city
where speed and greed transform the very substance
of everything we are compelled to see.
But since the failing of my father's strength
that land reproaches us, as a possession
held onto out of weakness and regret.
I have not walked the valley's length this spring,
and with those memories comes the thought how few
can still afford to see their Mother's face!
— Thus, Wordsworth, while conversing in my mind
with you, I read, and stumbled now and then,
and from my mother's face could not be certain

whether she heard or drowsed. But when I finished
she opened up her eyes and, smiling, said,
“How lovely—and you read it well,” nor could
I doubt her praise sincere. How blest I am
in one such parent still, in whose white age
more innocence and joy survive than in
most infant fosterlings of this dark time,
besieged even in their cribs by strangers’ greed!
Fortunate, too, in that I still can hear,
Wordsworth, your voice, though distant, and can still
guess at what you meant, and answer you
as I could never answer those who doubt.

Madison, Wisconsin, 1999

February

When winter has outworn its cloak of snow,
When cold and dark have nothing more to say,
When over all the moping clouds hang low
As if without the strength to move away,
When rustily the last year’s oak leaves cling
Fast to the boughs like a notice of intent
To hold on to the premises, let spring
Go looking elsewhere for a tenement;
When crows insist that things will stay the same,
When hope stares dully at an empty bin,
When winter clothes hang heavy on your frame,
When influenza calls and finds you in,
When time stands still as stone in cemetery,
Then it is, was, and will be February.

Beauty, Truth, and...

Fair, kind and true have often lived alone
–Shakespeare

Beauty, Truth and Goodness took a house,
Promising to live as sisters close,
To share the cleaning, gardening and dishes
And change off cooking chitlins, steaks and knishes.

They vowed that any boyfriends they might pick up
Would have to understand that they would stick up
For one another; but each hoped to wait
Until she saw her true prince at the gate.

Truth had seen Courage in a dream once night,
Beauty had seen Appreciative Delight,
While Goodness kept expecting Gratitude,
But every day the awakening was rude.

Weeks lengthened into months and into years,
And none of the dream-promised Three appears,
Hope waned, the bonds of constancy were loosed.
Truth, oddly, was the first to be seduced–

By Brutal Honesty, who sneered at Goodness
Till Truth and Beauty treated her with rudeness.
Poor Goodness, devastated, fell a prey
To Exploitation, and was dragged away.

The two left fought, till Beauty heard the plea
Of her long-time admirer, Vanity.
The house was sold a short time after that.
The owner has it divided into flats.

And since the names were changed, you'll never find
Those sisters who were once Fair, True, and Kind.

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Esther Cameron is a dual citizen of Israel and the US, now living in Jerusalem. She is the founding editor of *The Deronda Review*. Her poems and essays have appeared here and there; she has published her *Collected Works* on Amazon and has had one book published by an academic press—*Western Art and Jewish Presence in the Work of Paul Celan* (Lexington Books, 2014).

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