

LIVESAY'S TWO SEASONS OF LOVE

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THE CREATIVE INDIVIDUAL often is torn by internal emotional strife. Perhaps such conflict is an indispensable ingredient for sustaining the creative urge. Certainly Dorothy Livesay's *Collected Poems—The Two Seasons* reveals a repeated sense of conflict; one of her major themes involves the contradiction inherent in romantic love. In her poems she vacillates between her desire to be independent, to remain in control of her personal destiny, and her willingness to submit passively to male domination. Her romantic feelings are further complicated by their interplay with her intense interest and involvement in the major social issues and political movements of her time. These two sources of personal conflict repeatedly furnish themes for the poetry Dorothy Livesay wrote over a fifty year span of literary productivity.

Prior to her most concentrated period of political activity in the 1930's, Livesay's poetry exhibited a steady romantic emphasis. The intimate verses which Livesay wrote in her late teens and early twenties display a precocious poetic talent and a fervent emotional intensity. They also reflect her obsessive reliance on the conventional sex roles which were taken for granted in the society in which she lived. They reveal her personal vulnerability to the destructive effects of these stereotyped patterns of love relationships. Yet, even in this youthful period, the poet occasionally shows a resentful reaction against these constricting influences.

Livesay's early poetry indicates that she prides herself on such typically feminine characteristics as a spontaneous and instinctual reaction to love rather than the objective, abstract or intellectual approach which she considers to be typically masculine. This attitude is exemplified by "Interrogation," where the poet challenges her lover to unreservedly reciprocate the honesty of her advances, to accept the reversal of sanctioned male-female proprieties. "If I come unasked," she queries, "Will you mind?/Will you be there/Ready?" If she is the aggressor, the initiator of a sexual encounter, will her lover accordingly respond without equivocation — "forget what . . . [he] ever learned of etiquette?" She

berates the lack of impulsive spontaneity in her lover when he rationally puts off the hour of their meeting from early morning until noon, a deliberateness which she attributes somewhat sarcastically to the alleged differences between men and women. "Certainly: well/I've known/Men need to be alone — (Why Am I not the same?/Is love a single game?)"

"The Difference" also displays her irritation with her lover's slow, premeditated approach to love. She is exasperated with his failure to respond quickly and intuitively to emotions. She feels that his attitude betrays hesitation and a lack of intensity of feeling towards her. She is indignant at the insecurity which his lack of passion engenders. She compares his love-making to a scientist's study of the seasonal cycle of a tree's foliage. "As if," she declares, "The beauty of the thing could be/Made lovelier or marred by any mood/Of wind . . . as if/All beauty had not sprung up with the seed." She is incensed that he is slower to embrace their love than she; that he wants to know all her qualities before making a commitment, afraid that their relationship could be marred by changing moods. Such hesitant love she asserts is self-defeating and deprives the act of love of its most intense enjoyment. "With such slow ways you find no time to love/A falling flame, a flower's brevity." Similar feelings are delineated in "Sea-flowers . . . that sway in water/Beyond the arm of light . . . are cold and waxen and remote,/ Drifting downward out of sight." She concedes that his contemplations may be more complex, theoretical and thus immutable, but she feels that they are inferior to the tangible beauty of the concrete joys of life. "Thus though they be eternal/ Unheeding suns or snows/I choose the trembling flower of earth/That breathes before it goes."

Woman viewed as the passive recipient of the masculine energy force is a theme displayed in an early poem, "The Forsaken." The poet's identification of herself with a stone, "grey with water's passion," invokes the self-image of a passive, lifeless victim of powerful natural forces which assume masculine form. She and her feelings often are personified in the form of inanimate objects. The erosion of stone by wind and by the sweep of water might be taken to represent the general social forces and antagonisms which batter our lives, but the use of the word "kiss" in conjunction with the wind seems to connote a male image.

An embryonic awareness of the situation of women in her society is evident in her early poems, if sometimes indirectly. "Song of the Multitudes" contains many allusions to the boredom, monotony and dissatisfaction inherent in housework. The woman in this poem rationalizes her dreary domestic chores which would become bearable if only her longing for a communion with nature were satisfied. "Then I could turn within, turn to my work/in the house and learn these other ways," she reasons. Meanwhile, her husband's work traps her in the city where she depends solely upon him for consolation and companionship. His return home becomes the highlight of her day. Because she wishes to live with her

husband, she must comply with the lifestyle which his job dictates. But her resignation to her situation is fraught with resentment. The love which she shares with her husband becomes a painful prison. Alone with her torment, she addresses her invective to the mental effigy of her oppressor. "Therefore I say in all the beggar prayers/You do not hear," she silently addresses him, "love is a prisoned place,/Love is a darkness with one blinding lamp/To lighten it, where ever our tired eyes/Must gaze unswervingly or else we lose/All sense, all sight. Therefore I cry alone,/Let me go, let me fly away, let me find peace/Untroubled by the warring of two selves." She feels her nature as a woman repressed, as she is beset with these contradictory emotions. "So . . . /By little things you hold me from the door/," she states; "Bid me to sing within when some far voice/Integrally my own is hushed, is dumb." Today thoughts such as these have become commonplace in the quest for release from sexually stereotyped roles.

The Lawrencean image of the male as the embodiment of darkness and power, the female as passivity and light recurs throughout her poetry. "Bartok and the Geranium" provides a colourful example of this symbolism. She, the geranium, "preens herself in the light," which is sufficient for her natural growth, but the genius of "Bartok" requires a more expansive area. "He whirls/Explodes in space/ . . . Not even can he be/confined to the sky/But must speed high/and higher still/From galaxy to galaxy . . . She's Daylight/He is dark." She remains serene, calm and benevolent, in contrast to his wild intensity. When his madness is spent, her patience triumphs. Thus, the two spectral opposites of male-female interaction, one dynamic and aggressive, the other resilient and yielding are depicted as compatible, complementary, and mutually sustaining forces.

Enduring love for the poet often is presented as an elusive and unattainable goal. "If It were Easy" conveys her wish that she could secure strength and "succour" from love as easily as she can gain warmth from a fire. If only she could "creep close up to love," then she would be shielded from "Cold heavy evenings/Storm-bound, outside the door." "Alienation" expresses her chagrin at being excluded from the "radiance" of the male domain. She implies that she would be content merely to hover around her lover as a moth around a candle! A poem in the "Garden of Love" conveys a yearning for her lover to "Shape her" to his "will," since she has "failed" and "hated" loving him. She pleads with him to "Forget the hurt [she] had not meant to do." Similar displays of passivity and self-effacement recur throughout her poetry.

Livesay's dependence on self-definition through earning male esteem emerges in poems such as "Chained," "Dusty" and "Time," where the poet is unable to reconcile herself to the end of a relationship. Despite physical separation she yearns to retain a spiritual tie with her former lover, a "bond," that still defies ". . . angry scrutiny." She continues to sense her lover's intangible presence even after his departure from her immediate life. "I think you buried — /Turn and

see/Along my path/Your shadow dart." The memory of her lover is compared to an old glove that continues to fit despite its age and disuse. In imploring her lover to "not seek/The letting-go," she seems to dread the time when she will no longer please him, when he will regard her as a "couch, a chair/You've grown too used to, and admire no more/Its modern flair." When he is gone, Livesay is still haunted by her lingering attachment to her absent love: "I turn to run through fields alone/Or seek companions in a wood — /I find your feet before me gone/I am made captive where you stood." Even in her bereavement love is tenacious, and in her distress she empathizes with whatever similar feelings her former lover may be experiencing "because," she admits, "pain has the face of love, even while it strikes." She laments her inability to dispense with the persisting sentimental remnants of a lost love. She bemoans the fact that she has not "learned . . . after this terrible, beautiful loving/The way of love/When it goes."

Her anxiety that love will lead to a shattering psychological crisis also is evident in "Climax." Here she finds herself an instrument of her lover's will. Her heart is "stretched on wires,/tight, tight . . . even the smallest wind . . . /Can set it quivering — /And simply a word of yours,/However slight,/Could make it snap," — a catastrophe which seems inevitable. Afterwards, love's warm illusions are replaced by an attitude of cold detachment. "Consideration" outlines the ensuing bitterness: "A biting analysis/of one another . . ." followed by the sort of stilted conversation which displaces intimacy during a time of emotional severance — "A placing of words/On little shelves/As one touches delicate china." When separation becomes necessary, she leaves his arms, — "to break/Joy's fearful snare."

The positive attributes which she sees in love relationships often are counterpoised with their paralyzing negative aspects. Livesay realizes that her idealization of the male is a demeaning force that compels her against her will. Love is a cage in which she becomes a powerless captive. Yet her painful addiction is compensated by the immense joy she feels while safely under the male aegis. The poet's fears of conspiracies within the night, of the darker, malevolent elements of nature are allayed by the soothing presence of her lover: "My safety is with you, who lie asleep." The "guardian angel" which Livesay had imagined as a child is replaced by her lover and she is at the mercy of harsh realities only when he is absent. "Song for Departure" describes a temporary separation from her lover as making her "common again/To have common care." Love is the passion that transforms all banalities, all mundane objects and events into a meaningful whole. Yet like a "fever," its external flush of excitement conceals an inner core of potentially debilitating disease, of insecurity and dependency. "Weapons" details her efforts to protect herself from the enervating effects and uncertainties of this consuming dependency by her creative efforts and by more reliable and impersonal intellectual satisfactions. Here Livesay refers to her

persistent efforts to remain creative despite her adverse personal circumstances and frustrated loves. The tools of her craft — pen, desk and reading lamp — are the weapons that sustain her fight to comprehend and define “A dark [she] never learns to know.”

On the other hand, Livesay also is obsessed with the struggle to figuratively penetrate and possess her male lovers. She displays constant frustration at what seems to her to be the implacable, inviolable nature of the male. “Symbols” portrays male affection as a house in which the poet dwells. The poet views the man as a base of security, a self-contained unit which remains intact in spite of her attempts at occupation. She feels that she is “importunate without.” She is indignant at being barred entry from the man’s essential centre of being. When she finally manages to realize her intention, either by manipulation of some weakness in the male, or by intense insistence and pressure, she discovers that her object has eluded her. Once “inside” the “house core,” she finds either that her lover is a “bare, dusty room,” or that he has “fled.” By being overly eager and intense, she has transgressed the subtle laws of male-female interaction. She has destroyed the relationship by plunging too quickly. Once again she is barred from the sanctuary in which she longs to take refuge.

DURING THE ECONOMIC upheavals of the 1930’s, Livesay’s preoccupation with love no longer dominated her poetry. She concentrates instead on the crucial social issues of the time, giving a diverse and comprehensive picture of the dreary conditions arising from the depressing and the marginal existence of the majority of people during this decade. Nevertheless, the tone of her poems remains assertive. The poems are defiant of the political forces responsible for this historical disaster, strong in their advocacy of socialism, and rousing in their aspiration for revolution. The occasional references to personal love in her poems are now put into a more general social perspective, or at least tempered by an awareness of their relative insignificance. Personal tribulation is dwarfed by overwhelming catastrophes of a universal implication.

“Comrade” reflects upon the pleasant memory of one night Livesay spent with a man, an isolated episode which brought her great fulfillment “love more sweet than I/Have ever known; without an aftertaste.” This single incident of consummation was devoid of egotistical concern. Years later, upon meeting the man, she sees him as he now appears — changed from the vivid youth of her memory into a “Grey man/Without dreams,/Without a living or an overcoat.” The image is not a physically attractive one, having shed its romantic illusions. Nevertheless, because they are both committed to a similar political goal, and are united in a humanistic love for people, their shared objectives draw them together more

firmly than a physical embrace. "Sealed in struggle now," they are closer than if their "bodies were sealed in love." Although romantic symbolism still finds frequent use, as in "I Never Hear," the poet seems more relaxed. She has become reconciled to realities which include more than one aspect of the human condition. Her social commitments seem to have displaced those of a more personal sort.

The political climate of the forties and fifties appears to have shaped some of the poet's strength. Her dismay at the social situation tempers her personal relationships. The course of political developments did not evolve along the lines which the poet had envisioned. The first years of this phase are those of the second World War, a period that is distinguished from all others not only because it provided an unremitting malevolent enemy who perpetrated atrocities, but also because it ushered in the atomic bomb. With the deployment of this bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one of the most horrific chapters in human history was begun — one which through McCarthyism, the advent of the "cold war," and numerous colonial wars, particularly in Vietnam, continues into the present. The love portrayed by Livesay in this period is more than a compensation for personal mishaps and minor hardships. Now love serves to assuage the anxiety and agony occasioned by more terrible tragedies and imminent dangers. "Day and Night" illustrates her use of love as an antidote and refuge against the harsh and pervasive social realities which arise amidst the chaos of war. The poet calls "to love/Deep in dream/. . . Be with me in the pounding/In the knives against my back/Set your voice resounding/Above the steel's whip crack." This poem also shows her anguish at the prevalence of death on such a massive scale. She views love as a numbing anodyne while her own personal life absurdly continues: "It seemed a poor thing to do, to wed . . . /When Spain cast a ballot and was outraged, raped/In an olive grove, by a monastery wall. It seemed no time for love." Yet in the last of her "Seven Poems for Duncan," she accepts somewhat reluctantly the fact that "Life goes on . . . No hazard here, for we/Like sleepers plunging deep/Into recurring waves of dream/Cannot awake from that connected bliss./ We are asleep on the long limb of time." Thus love is the dream that counteracts a nightmarish reality. "Lullaby" depicts the poet as hungry for love's sedative: "drug me and dope me,/dress me with love's fine hand/Till the end of our time."

Throughout the fifties, Livesay's insight into the social position of the female is becoming more concrete and definite, and provides a leitmotif which counteracts her reliance on love as a distraction from social reality. Despite the social forces, pressures and conditionings of her society, and her role as wife and mother, she is attempting to define her identity as an independent woman. The joys of child-bearing (as in "Carnival" and "Serenade of Spring,") and the security of the family structure, were rewarding, but also involved time-consuming responsibilities. Her new focus of personal concerns tended to displace her outside

political interests. However, she displays a growing awareness of the inherent limitations of the maternal role. She begins "The Three Emily's" (referring to Brontë, Dickinson and Carr), with the assertion that she pities their lack of fulfillment through male-female union and motherhood. The three are "crying" in her head, and walk alone. In the second verse she acknowledges their unencumbered freedom. Their liberty was intellectual, natural and spiritual, and the world which they had interpreted so beautifully became their love. "Their kingdom was the sky/ . . . From wandering lonely they could catch/The inner magic of a heath — /A lake their palette, any tree/Their brush could be." In the third verse she still insists that each one, "separate man in woman's form," is jealous of the poet's fulfillment as a mother. She imagines them reproachful of her gift for creating human life. However, she realizes that because of her familial commitment some of her artistic freedom is denied her, and "only for a brief span/Am I an Emily on mountain snows . . . / And so the whole that I possess/ Is still much less." In the final analysis, the whole that she possesses — the combination of motherhood and creativity — seems inferior to their perfect concentration on and integration into the realm of artistic creation. Because they are liberated from the conventions and demands to which Livesay is subject, they "move triumphant" through her head and she is the one uncomforted. The "Other" provides a stronger reiteration of this theme, but now it is transposed to a realization of man's constricting effect on women and some of the attitudes responsible for perpetuating this relation. Most men do not see beyond the feminine stereotype, one which defines a woman in terms of her capacity and willingness to meet their needs and desires. They fail to recognize her inherent human potential. To do so might threaten the sanctity of their "property." Men, Livesay declares, "prefer an island/With its beginning ended . . . /A road/circling, shell-like/Convex and fossiled/Forever winding inward . . . A woman/Held as a shell/ On a sheltering island." Livesay states that she can no longer comply with these limitations and be an introverted refuge, symbiotically dependent on her male companion. She, the poet asserts, is "a mainland" ranging from "Upper country to the inner core." She challenges anyone to show her some facet of life she has not experienced in the expansive travels of her thoughts and the comprehensive range of her emotions. Her final affirmation of her integrity is that she no longer needs to prove her capacities to others. The experiences she has had are totally beyond their comprehension. She consists of components that "none shall trespass:/None possess." The kind of "mainland" she embodies defies definition because of "its inaccess." A woman whose thoughts and interests are so expansive is too much for the majority of men to handle. Livesay's independence and her growing disillusionment with her original vision frequently find expression in these later poems. "Wedlock" proclaims her existential awareness of the soul's ultimate isolation, even in love and her longing to overcome this separation.

Despite the unity of their flesh, "two lovers must remain/ . . . in each alone . . . prisoned yet/As soul alone must thresh/in body's net;/And our two souls weep inwardly." "On Looking into Henry Moore" forcefully expresses this theme. Here the poet portrays the conflicting characteristics of maleness and femaleness as embodied in their opposing socially prescribed symbols. "When I have found/Passivity in fire/and fire in stone . . ." the synthesis of the two will yield a complete self-contained person. "Female and male/I'll rise alone . . ./self-extending and self-known." Like the legendary Phoenix, she will be resurrected and stand "anew, alone . . ./Devoid of flesh . . . this hasty dress." She would then be "one unit/As a tree or a stone/Woman in man, and man in womb." A being uniting the features of both sexes, she then would be self-sufficient and truly independent. While this extreme and dramatic device for release from the constraints of "human bondage" seems a rather alienating solution, it sharply defines the poet's yearning to be a "whole self," to attain a kind of completion she usually finds only incompletely in sexual intercourse.

Livesay's later poetry also reveals her increasing social cynicism, an attitude engendered by her disillusionment with the Russian Revolution and its repressive policies under Stalin's rule, and by the ensuing hostilities rampant in the atmosphere of the cold war. Her poems express a more general and diffuse humanitarian philosophy. She prophesies a bleak future for contemporary youth in "Generation 1955." In her view, they are living hedonistic lives, oblivious to social issues. In the economic upsurge and material affluence which followed the war, she charges that they parasitically "lapped it to their lips." They are ignorant of the empathetic bonds which united participants in the earlier social struggles in which the poet was involved. "They never learned;" she mourns, "They see us, but are blind."

"After Hiroshima" is an admission of defeat. The visions and revelations have vanished. "The beating rain bears no message for man; . . . No hearts dare listen while fear stirs the womb. What the right hand doeth, stirring the pot of evil/The hydrogen brew; the left hand knows not, is sleeping." The effusive lyricism which once characterized Livesay's imagery is being replaced with apocalyptic visions that are more compatible with the times. The poet finds but a vestige of hope for the future in the vigilance of the succeeding generation; "Only a child's belief, rocked in a cradle of doubt,/Can prophesy our safety; illuminate our hope." However, lacking confidence in the form which future political solutions may take, she seems to retreat from the vanguard of the social struggle. Her despair is evident in her pain at foreseeing the future of her grandchild's world: "It's going to take a hundred years to annihilate a people/to bitter the ricefields with blood/dry Delta's water into salt — / a hundred years/so our grandchildren growing up/and their children/Will be humans who feel no pity/for the green earth/ and who look upon procreation/with indifference . . ./When I see my

grandchild running/in a game of football/his helmet is empty/in his right arms/
he carries his head." Thus pessimism pervades her vision of mankind's potential
for survival. Though still militant, her writing subsides from the revolutionary
invective in which she had once been so eloquent. Perhaps these social factors
contributed to the re-emphasis on love which appears in Livesay's later poetry.
The intensity of her response to love seems to vary with the fluctuations in her
personal and social outlook.

The images of her later poems remain couched in idealized terms and her
evocation of love and nature are sometimes lofty. However, she displays a new
maturity in assessing love, and seems reconciled to certain immutable discrepan-
cies between her ideal visions and expectations and the limitations and frailties
of human beings. She leaves her vision of perfectible love to her dreams, where
". . . no faltering/Grew between your tree and mine." She becomes more objec-
tive, even in her personal relations, and can examine her own emotions and put
them into a perspective that helps somewhat to alleviate her former compulsion
to possess her lover, and her reluctance to relinquish him. "Letter at Midnight"
and "The Morning After" show her growing recognition of the seeds of her
restlessness with a provocative bravado that has hitherto been absent, at least
in such bold form. She is not begging, but rather demanding that her lover
"Behave to [her] with love," for she is a "country field/ untamed/Restless for
rider." The terrain of her mental and physical nature is complex and full of
traps that need careful exploration and contemplation. Her former self-efface-
ment is replaced with pride. She is a challenge that "Only a thorough-bred could
hurdle . . . Only a bold surefooted beast/would venture." She is inured to the
pain of desertion by a lover. She has become hardened, even cynical. She now
lives a life "On the fringe of feeling — . . . Hard sense builds me a door/Where
I survey the morning." She can now see beyond immediate personal pain to the
persistent continuity of life. She recognizes that "Tears will not build again the
house long planned/Nor man the bastion."

LIVESAY'S RENEWED dependence on love, in her more recent
poems, is accompanied by expressions of greater physical need, although her tone
becomes more cynical, and she is wary of emotional pitfalls. Her awareness of
the implications of the ageing process heightens her concern with her mortality.
An alerted sense of the imminence of a vague but malevolent fate prompts a
regression to her former image of a passive compliance in love. These later love
poems are preoccupied with physical description, and convey a tone of pathetic
eagerness. However, they deal honestly with a period of the poet's psychic

development which is characteristic of many women in our society who are past middle age.

"Notations of Love" describes Livesay's struggle to surmount the signs of ageing. In spite of the "crow's feet" around her eyes, the "skeleton of leaves," her lips stay fresh, "allowing the tongue to unsheathe its secret skin and bolt the lightning in." Clearly the ageing process has not quenched her sensual requirements. Her descriptions of her own body are highly critical when she is not subject to the admiration and appreciation of a lover. This self-deprecation is exemplified by "Sorcery," a poem in which she depicts her features as witch-like; her breasts "withered gourds," when they are not the objects of a lover's caresses. "Not to be touched and swept by your arm's force," she tells her lover, "gives me the ague/turns me into a witch." She implores the "engineer of spring" to restore her vitality, to "magic me/out of insanity/from scarecrow into girl again." "Journey East" longingly laments that "... you cannot hold what vanishes ... the essence is ... to catch the bird in season/hold, hold a snowdrop/ ... then let it go."

"The Touching" typifies Livesay's renewed but somewhat demeaning and self-conscious approach to love in her later poetry. She gains release from her disquieting realizations only in the dissolution of her identity into that of another. She requests her lover to shelter her "from the shiver of dawn." She urges him to physically penetrate her "Again gently/so the penis completing me ... is my second heart beating ... /I drown in your identity." "Four Songs" reveals the poet's perceptive self-awareness of the forces that motivate her sexual relationships. "Give me the will you said/and in return/take from my fill of passion ... You did it from design/I from compulsion." "Eve" finds her jubilant that her powers of attraction are not yet extinguished: "In fifty seconds, fifty summers sweep and shake me — / am alive!/I can stand/up still/hoarding this apple/in my hand." "The Skin of Time" gives voice to her vigorous resistance to the constrictions which society imposes on ageing women. "How can I cry, when I/Fell timeless, ageless, high/As heaven's hemisphere/How can I cease to live/Borne by your breath my dear?" In a sense these passionate proclamations from a woman in her sixties are a spirited and defiant rebellion against social convention. They reveal a sensitive vulnerability which renders the poet all the more human.

In the final analysis Livesay's opposing visions of love are never fully resolved. She fails to achieve the self-containment she so envies in a man. She is dependent upon love as a panacea, for escape from her despair over social and personal realities. The void within her is most substantially filled when occupied by male love both physically and emotionally. It is most deeply satisfied when she feels that the male has responded with equal intensity to her feelings. This reveals the vicious cycle which love can become for her. The male also is subjugated to a degree of dependency and unhappiness, because the woman can only compensate for her feelings of enslavement by her desire to consume him. "I've swallowed

you/through all my orifices/you are jonah'd now/fast within me." Although she will grant the male the satisfaction of pretending she believes that he makes love to her solely for "self-seeking ease," able to "take me or leave me there/Just as you please," she is jubilant and sings that his need for her is deeper than physical satiation. She compensates for her bondage to his "will and mind" by assuring herself that he is equally dependent. This is contrary to her earlier strivings for a liberating love.

The persistent dichotomy of Livesay's romantic attitude is most explicit within the framework of a very recent poem, "The Operation," where love is depicted first as a healing process and her lover as the doctor "appraising how to create from bone and flesh/a new woman." However once his mission is accomplished, the "intimate flashing bond" dissolves and she is released from his "care." The love which revitalized her is now portrayed as a disease. "Love was indulged in as excuse/for going to bed/we transmitted kisses/and I caught between my thighs/the antibody." From her convalescent window she visualizes her lover as a "well man/free of opposites," free of the burden of retrospective emotion. In her desire to free herself from these malingerings symptoms of a finished love affair she invents images of self-destruction. "I decided to complete the operation/tear myself into four quarters." She finishes on a desperate note of yearning for freedom from the malady of love: "... for now you are ... gone/and I must measure me/O let me grow/ . . . to reach a dazzled strangeness/sun-pierced sky." Despite the evidence that she was continually frustrated by her failure to attain this aim, and that in many instances she remained divided, her poems are a forceful and accurate record of both the inner and outer conflicts of "women in love."

The difficulty of these struggles for a woman with such an abundance of intelligence, perceptivity and insight, a woman who achieved an enviable creative output, accentuates the tenacious grip of enculturation, the pervasive conditioning of our social structure. If what Livesay defines as "the pull between community and private identity that is characteristic of being a woman" wrought such havoc in her own psychological existence, one can imagine the effect it has on those women who remain unenlightened victims of a "locked-in role."

HANGING

Elizabeth Gourlay

On the bare blackened tree one apple alone.
All her golden companions withered and gone.