THE YEMASSEE LANDS

I

In the Yemassee Lands
Peace-belts unwind in the Spring on the banks of Savannah;
Flowers like wampum weave in the grass
Reiterate beads of pink-orange, of clouded white, of
pale, shimmerless ochre,
Mile after mile.

II

Round the curve of the river,

Meshed by conniving impatient shoots of the gum tree,

Streamers of silver dart, muffled lapping of paddles.

Always, just round the turning, the stealthy canoe

with its naked upstanding warrior

Comes . . . for the wild-fowl rise in a hurtling of

startled feathers;

Never comes into sight.

TIT

In the Yemassee Lands
Cypress roots, at the edge of the swamp, roughly
fluted, age-wrinkled,
Have budded their rufous knobs like dim and reptilian eyes,
That watch.
Orchids, liquid gold, bend from cylindrical sheaths
Under a phantom moccasined tread.
Gossamer webs, barring the overgrown way through
the woods,
Shudder but do not break, betraying the passage
Of footsteps gone by.

IV

In the undulant mist of the sunsets of summer
Slim pines stand with scarlet and quivering outlines—
Initiate boys whose whipped young blood leaps up
Now, the first time, to the war-path.
Shadows of red, shadows of bronze and of copper
Disengage from the wood-growth;
Cowering, melting, lost, reappearing,
One after one, the long, lithe, menacing war-line
Loops through the stems.
Light cups the crouching knees,
Splinters on polished shoulders,
Ravels in towering head-plumes.

V

In the Yemassee Lands

When with blowing of wood-smoke and throbbing of hidden drums
Indian Summer fashions its spell,
Trembling falls on the air.
Wild things flatten themselves in the jeopardy of the shade.
Out of the snarling keen-toothed vines
Berries wink with the cunning obsidian gleam
Of the arrow-head, and deep in the shuddering fern
The rattlesnake coils his pattern of war.
Silence, inimical, lurks in the dark:
Softly on buckskinned soles, halting a step behind,
Something follows and waits . . .
And will not be appeased.

But when Autumn unleashes the winds
And storm treads the lowlands,
Trees, like a panic of horses galloping over the sky-line,
(Charging of chestnut and roan and bay,
Tossing their frantic forelocks)
Flee from the rush
Of invisible hunters.

VII

Stars in the coppery afterglow of the sundown
Hang like strings of teeth on the savage breast of a warrior;
Water-willows trail in the shadowy depths of Savannah,
Draggle like scalps from the war-belt;
And the night-wind sings overhead
Like arrows on deadly sendings,
In the Yemassee Lands.

VIII

Gray through young leaves blows the smoke from the ancient fires;
The thud of the young men's dances troubles the earth.
Shadows from ambushed boughs
Reach with a plucking hand for the hair.
The lightning-set pine far away blazes with hideous cracklings,
Remembering the long black tresses of captive squaws
Tied to the death-pyre.

After two hundred years
Has the forest forgotten?
Always the trees are aware
(Significant, perilous, shaken with whispers of dread and of welcome)
Of the passage of urgent feet.
Violent shoots strain up to the air and the sunshine
Of cut-over land;
Leaves crowd over the barrows of last year's skeleton leaves.
Ever and ever again
The Red Man comes back to his own
In the Yemassee Lands.

THE OLD MAN

Do they ever grow really old, Do they cease to believe in miracles?

He sits in the Park,
His buttonhole blooms unconcerned, a bud in the crack
of a ruin;
His fine, gathered fingers curl upward:
He is holding hands with the sun.

Like a girl's shadow

The furtive smell of the Spring runs over his face.

"She would come like that,
A little abashed, a little defiant . . ."
He fondles the past in his palms with the alchemical sun.
The past?
"She will come . . ."
The future is coming!