

## *special Handling*

David Schubert and  
Marcia Nardi

When you cannot go further  
It is time to go back and wrest  
Out of failure some  
Thing shining.

(From David Schubert's "No Finis")

How difficult the erection of even  
That fence of a hair's breadth  
Between  
Body and soul of another,  
Whose presence crams  
Ten worlds:  
Like trying to keep entirely to the right  
Or to the left, jostled,  
On a city pavement;  
Or on a country lane,  
When letting a car pass,  
Having  
One foot upon grass  
And another on gravel.

(From Marcia Nardi's "Poem")

**A**spirating poets from the lower class are often discouraged. If they are hardy as Whitman, they may disregard the "foo-foos"

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and prevail. If they are too fragile, they may withdraw from the fray, cease writing altogether. In between, they persist, complaining frequently about their lack of literary acquaintance or distaste for the business that accompanies their craft. David Schubert and Marcia Nardi complained frequently about their lack of publishing success, bemoaned their ineptitude at self-promotion, and voiced discomfort when they made rare ventures among “literary people.” Schubert’s wife insisted that his inability to get his poems published sapped his confidence in his gift and provoked the episodes that forced his institutionalization for the final three years of his life before his early death at thirty-three. The querulous Nardi alienated almost everyone who was ever close to her, but attributed her unbearable loneliness primarily to a lack of intelligent literary friends—a lack she explained by her background, not her personality. Both were damaged humans who harbored special talents, talents lauded by readers as disparate as William Carlos Williams, John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, Louise Bogan, Theodore Weiss, and Morton Dauwen Zabel. Both were convinced—or deluded—that more propitious circumstances would have allowed their poetic talents to thrive.

John Ashbery’s book *Other Traditions* includes essays on Schubert and five other poets, each of whom, he says, “requires some kind of special handling. That is, reading their work isn’t quite as simple as it is with a poet such as, say, John Keats, where one can simply take down a book from a shelf, open it, and begin reading and enjoying it. With each of them, some previous adjustment or tuning is required. It also helps to know something of their biographies and the circumstances in which they worked, since these are responsible for wide fluctuations in the quality of what they wrote” (95).

Urging James Laughlin to publish Nardi’s poems, William Carlos Williams wrote: “She asked me not to plead for her, wants the verses to speak for themselves. I told her she needed a

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push, that her work did not appeal at first glance since its virtue was not on the surface of it—no matter how good a critic might pick it up. The form is nil but there are lines and passages that are worth all the facile metrical arrangement ever invented and these do actually give the verse a form of its own” (O’Neil, 26).

What form of special handling is required to appreciate the poems of David Schubert or Marcia Nardi?

Born in unpromising circumstances, both were traumatized in childhood, handicapped by poverty, and alienated from Whitman’s “average.” As adults, they were abusive to their intimates, helpless and inept in practical matters, fumbling in promoting their poems. They suffered chronic illness, sometimes self-exacerbated, and spent great amounts of time in the care of doctors, occasionally in institutions.

Yet John Ashbery wrote that he values the poetry of David Schubert “more than Pound or Eliot” (122). After he compared the experience of reading Schubert’s poems to opening a window in a stuffy room, he was bemused to discover that William Carlos Williams had used the same metaphor to describe reading Schubert’s poetry forty years before.

Williams was willing to say publicly that “Marcia Nardi, here and there in her work, produces a line or two as fine as anything that anyone, man or woman, writing today can boast of” (414). Upon receiving a later batch of poems, he wrote to her that “they strike completely through my guard, they appear to me to be among the best poems of the day—so much better than what is being accepted as good that I feel ashamed for my sex, to say the least, which generally monopolizes the scene. They are warm, defenseless, and well made” (O’Neil, 140).

David Schubert was born in 1913 in New York City to working-class parents who soon moved to Detroit. He was one of three children. When he was twelve, his father abandoned the family, his mother committed suicide, and it was David who discovered

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her body. The children were sent to live with relatives, which brought David back to Brooklyn. In the biographical note he compiled for the only publication of a substantial group of his poems during his lifetime, he wrote that he “was homeless from the age of 15, supporting himself by selling newspapers, working as busboy, soda jerker, waiter, farm hand and various other jobs. At one time he did a turn in the C.C.C. All in all, it was anything but an easy life” (*Five Young American Poets*, 134). Yet somehow he distinguished himself enough at Boys High in Brooklyn to obtain a scholarship to Amherst College.

At Amherst he was inspired to pursue poetry but wasn't engaged with other classes. He gained the attention of Robert Frost and John Theobald, but lost his scholarship. Frost and other professors interceded on his behalf, and Schubert was allowed to return to college, but he lasted less than a semester. He spent the next couple of years in the Civilian Conservation Corps and as itinerant farm laborer, often sleeping in missions and shelters. He also fell in love and at the age of twenty married Judith Ehre, a teacher at a progressive school in Manhattan. He and his wife found an apartment in Brooklyn Heights near where, Schubert was pleased to note, Hart Crane lived while composing *The Bridge*. They were friends with poets Ben Belitt, Horace Gregory, Marya Zaturenska, Theodore Weiss, and painter Mark Rothko. And in 1936, Schubert won a prize from *Poetry* magazine for his poem “Kind Valentine.”

After this modest initial success, however, Schubert spent the remainder of the depression doing editorial work at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, reliant on his wife's income to support the household, and growing increasingly frustrated and disturbed by his inability to find a publisher for his poems. He was not idle. During the next ten years he composed a book of poems and a novel, completed undergraduate study at CCNY, pursued a master's degree in literature at Columbia, and then a second degree at Columbia in library science. His wife thought

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that in the Brooklyn Institute “David had a perfect job . . . for writing. But he did not want to work. He wanted money and he wanted to be at home and he wanted to write . . . as if that was *all* he wanted to live for” (“David Schubert,” 250).

Schubert sought constantly for ways to leave his job. He hoped first that a master’s degree would get him a college teaching gig, then hoped for a position in a college library, but finally returned to the Brooklyn Institute with promise of a “more responsible position.”

I am fired from my job by flames, big  
As angry consciences: I can do  
Nothing: I have not one ability! This man  
Whom I am waiting to see in the lobby—  
All my life I am waiting for something that  
Does not eventuate—will he  
Exist?

(From *Midston House*)

All the while, Schubert suffered from depression. His behavior became increasingly erratic and sometimes violent. His wife complained that he disappeared for days at a time without explanation. He was granted a month at Yaddo, but returned home after a mere three days. His wife wrote to Karen Horney, who couldn’t see them but put the Schuberts in touch with another doctor. Schubert continued to see a psychiatrist, but wrote to a friend in 1940 that “the desert years seem to cling to me more and more. Every once in a while I think I’m out of it, but there are so many places in each day in which one falls onto nothing at all. But I’m making a battle with the Enemy, anyway” (“David Schubert,” 209).

Outside the window it was  
A hot saggy day in August. The Coast Guard  
Drilling at war, far as the Pacific.  
As poverty is my taskmaster, as

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I study the Victor Record Catalog instead  
Of listening to the paragon's  
Prerogative: Eugene Ormandy, my  
Expectancy  
Makes me slightly sick, as when years ago,  
Hungry for food, I came to friends and they  
Talked; now I wait for her to speak  
The meanings which I must negate before  
I am admitted to the gayest person.  
(From "Victor Record Catalog")

In early 1941 David admitted to Judith that he was having an affair with a coworker at the institute. Apparently she was having an affair too. They still enjoyed warm at-home evenings with friends, but these could erupt suddenly into abusive outbursts, even physical attacks. David finished a novel and tried to place it, but without success. As it returned from publisher after publisher, he became increasingly distraught. Enraged after one rejection, he destroyed the manuscript. That summer, New Directions decided to include Schubert's forty-page poetry manuscript, "The Simple Scale," in *Five Young American Poets: Second Series, 1941*. (The other four young poets were Paul Goodman, Jeanne McGahey, Clark Mills, and Karl Shapiro.) He received an advance of twenty-five dollars and wrote for the volume "A Short Essay on Poetry."

What I see as poetry is a sample of the human scene, its incurably acute melancholia redeemed only by affection. This sample of endurance is innocent and gay: the music of vowel and consonant is the happy-go-lucky echo of time itself. Without this music there is simply no poem. It borrows further gayety by contrast with the burden it carries—for this exquisite lilt, this dance of sound, must be married to a responsible intelligence before there can occur the poem. Naturally, they are one: meanings and music, metaphor and thought. In the course of poetry's career, perhaps new awarenesses are discovered, really new

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awarenesses and not verbal combinations brought together in any old way. This rather unimportant novelty is sometimes a play of possibility and sometimes a genuinely new insight: like *Tristram Shandy*, they add something to this Fragment of Life.

(*Five Young American Poets*, 136)

But by the time the book was published, he was again without a job. His note to close friends Theodore and Renée Weiss began, “Buy the book. I don’t have no money, don’t have no job, don’t have nothin” (“David Schubert,” 251). Judith said that he was “shattered” by the book’s failure to attract reviews. By July, he was again contemplating abandoning writing.

A ghastly ordeal it was. In  
Retrospect, I am no longer young.  
Wise, sad, as unhappy as seeing  
Someone you love, with whom life has  
Brought suffering, or someone you  
Have nothing in common with, yet love—  
Unable to speak a word.

If when I say this I weep, it is not  
Because my heart has turned into a  
Lachrymose commentator; the  
Discus thrower’s still  
There—the shining one, quick. It is because  
In my moment of rejoicing, I  
Thought that one who has suffered with me shall  
Rejoice. There was no  
One. Not one answered.

Of suffering, who wants to be reminded?

(From *No Title*)

But he returned to library school and by the following July had received a note from Morton Zabel suggesting he submit a manuscript for a competition in which Zabel was to be one of the judges. Schubert replied that he had a manuscript that he

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would like to have published, in part to be rid of it so he could begin upon another book, “a sort of *Vita Nuova*, strictly poetry” (“David Schubert,” 265). But in January 1943, David grabbed a pair of scissors and threatened to kill Judith. She escaped from the apartment and returned the next morning with his psychiatrist.

Bedlam was what we found; both windows were still open, the bed unslept in, torn pieces of David’s manuscript lying about the floor, two oil paintings of me ripped out of their frames, were cut and scattered about, and things from drawers and closets were strewn everywhere. David was gone—and I felt, for the first time, relieved. (“David Schubert,” 267)

Almost two weeks later, Judith received word that Schubert was in a mental hospital in Washington, D.C., where he had gone to see Archibald MacLeish about getting into the navy. Although David complained that his “acquaintance with literary people is rather limited” (227), Judith was able to call on Morton Zabel, Ben Belitt, and Louise Bogan for assistance in getting David transferred to Bloomingdale’s in White Plains, New York, where he was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic (“David Schubert,” 278–84; Ashbery, 128) and treated with electric shocks. He lived until April 1, 1946, when he died of tuberculosis while institutionalized in Central Islip, but only left the hospital for a brief period in late 1944, when his sister took him into her house. Shortly thereafter, however, he was found talking and gesticulating to himself in a New York City subway, and was again institutionalized.

For fifteen years after Schubert’s death Judith, though remarried, and Theodore and Renée Weiss continued to offer his poems to publishers, until in 1961 Macmillan published his only book, *Initial A*. After another twenty-two years, the *Quarterly Review of Literature*, edited by the Weisses, published a special volume entitled “David Schubert: Works and Days.”

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Farewell, O zinnias, tall as teetotalers,  
And thou, proud petunias, pastel windows of joy,  
Also to you, noble tree trunks, by name  
Elm, with your dark bark in the dark rain, couchant  
Like comfortable elephants. And you  
Mailbox colored robin's egg blue on the poor  
House, shy, set back (a poor gentleman but  
Irreproachable), with your shutters robin's egg  
Green. You, street, striated with rain like a new penny,  
And houses planted by arbor-vitae trees,  
By miniature pines that lean against you for  
Support—Hail and farewell!

(From *The Happy Traveller*)

As William Carlos Williams described his first meeting with Marcia Nardi, a “pint-size, bedraggled to the point of a Salvation Army reject” was “blown into my office one night, soaked to the skin by a heavy rain and in frightened need, in desperate need” (O’Neil, 161–62). She had traveled by ferry and train from her apartment in Greenwich Village to Rutherford, New Jersey, then walked in a torrent from the train station to Dr. Williams’s office. A neighbor had phoned police during a violent shouting match between Nardi and her fifteen-year-old son. When Nardi told police that she could not control her son and that his school had recommended a psychiatric evaluation, they committed the boy to Bellevue. Now a repentant Nardi was eager to get him out. She was then involved with Harvey Breit, an editor at the *New York Times Book Review* and an acquaintance of Williams. It was apparently Breit who suggested that she visit Rutherford. Williams listened to her tale and offered counsel about getting the boy released. Before she left, Nardi handed the doctor a group of her poems and asked him to read them.

Not that I hoped the kind sense would reclaim  
A heart in exile,

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But flame at least conceals  
The nature of its fuel:  
Flame that steals  
A shape no different  
Nor hue nor name  
From fragrant pine  
Than from the rotting beams  
Of tenements,  
A beauty similar  
From kindled forests  
And the measured hearth.

Williams returned Nardi's poems with a brief letter in which he noted that "these poems have in them definitely some of the best writing by a woman (or by anyone else) I have seen in years. They also have plenty of bad writing in them, unfinished, awkward writing" (O'Neil, 9). He asked her to send him clean copies of the poems and to allow him to "work on them from time to time. . . . If you care to accept my criticisms that will be your responsibility. A valuable book may come of them in the end" (9). Thus began a correspondence that, though intermittent, extended for over fifteen years, and from which Williams extracted the "Cress letters" that he included in *Paterson*.

Marcia Nardi was born Lillian Massell in Boston in 1901. She attended Wellesley College, but left before graduation and moved to New York City. She described her immigrant family as "the worst kind of white trash" (O'Neil, 10) and apparently changed her name so they could not track her to New York. There she began a literary career that included early publications of poems and reviews in V. F. Calverton's *Modern Quarterly*, the *Nation*, *Literary Digest*, and the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*. She met other young writers and artists and for a while lived in the same boarding house as Hart Crane and Allen Tate.

Her life changed profoundly after her son was born in 1926. Her relationship with the child's father ended soon after, and

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though she continued to publish poems during the next few years, as she raised the boy and tried to support him on a single income, she drifted away from writing. Between the years of 1929 and 1941, she published nothing while working at a series of jobs ranging from editing to waitressing to clerking in a five and dime. She was proud that, despite the depression, she did well enough to pay tuition for her son at private schools. By 1939 she began to write poems again, but “had to spend almost a year evolving all over again the very fashion of writing with which I’d left off, so that during the first year of my recent return to poetry, my work was almost as bad as that I’d written at 17 and 18, and had to undergo the very same processes of experimentation and development all over again before eventually growing into a continuity with the point where I’d previously stopped” (O’Neil, 12).

Sometime after beginning to write poems again, she began seeing Breit. Her first literary friend in many years, Breit encouraged her to submit poems for publication. Whether from timidity or indifference, she didn’t. But she did feel strongly enough about them to take them with her when Breit arranged her appointment with Dr. Williams.

At that time she and her teenage son were sharing a one-room apartment on West Twelfth Street, though she was planning to send him to live with a farm family as soon as school was out. Williams promised to help her get her poems published and to find a suitable job. It’s evident through the years of their correspondence that he prioritized his aid in that order. Nardi was grateful for his enthusiasm for her poetry. As she grew older and realized minimal publishing success, that enthusiasm became more important to her; she carried one letter from him in her pocketbook for years, folded so many times that she had to tape it together. But initially, she was less interested in his promotion of her poetry than in his concern for her welfare—and his friendship. She complained to Williams that “most of the people

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I've had to associate with during my adult life have been either on the mental level of grocery clerks or else of the gutter" (O'Neil, 10). Though she met Williams only twice, he represented all that was missing in her life—artistic company, emotional intimacy, financial security. She was also chronically ill, perhaps hypochondriacal, racing from doctor to doctor without satisfaction and certain that only Dr. Williams would provide an accurate diagnosis. She believed that he was "the only man I've ever met who could have offered me the sort of relationship in which I could be completely contained" (O'Neil, 191). As her letters became more effusive, revelatory, and desperate, his letters remained formal and increasingly distant, signed simply "Sincerely, W. C. Williams." He consistently addresses the business at hand, whether publishing, job hunting, or her mysterious illness, and advises her early in their correspondence that he would like to incorporate excerpts from her letters in the long poem he is writing.

But he steadfastly rebuffed her efforts to see him—apparently they met only once after her initial visit to his office, when he agreed to meet her at a midtown restaurant for dinner. Yet, because of his enthusiasm for her poems, he continued to intercede on her behalf. In response to her pleas of poverty, he frequently sent her "loans," though it's clear that neither of them expected that these would be repaid. He inquired about jobs and frequently sent her leads, often giving her the names of contacts and allowing her to use his name as reference. Most important from his view, he pushed James Laughlin to publish her poems, first in the *New Directions* annual, then in a small book.

This ain't no ingenue and she ain't dumb. . . . I wish I could do something for her, an unknown and unwanted . . . she's a good piece of steel. (O'Neil, 23)

It's very difficult to get the good out of her work. Very few people will stop to refine, in the judgments so poor an ore. That has

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been her life and it is palpable in everything she does. . . . I think the woman is wrapping up in the shoddy of her miserable existence a flash of real merit. (O'Neil, 37)

When Laughlin agreed to publish a group of seventeen poems in *New Directions* with an introduction by Williams, Nardi was initially excited—until she read Williams's introduction.

Marcia Nardi, now in her early thirties, is that woman you remember who disappointed her shocked parents by insisting on art school rather than college—and came to grief because of it. . . . She is that woman who got a job in the office of *The Liberal Weekly*, did a few reviews, spoke out of turn a few times and found herself working on tables in a cheap restaurant. Her feet and her hands bothered her. She's the one who was given the review to do, needing some extra cash, of a book by the editor's wife—and nobody told her why she was expected to praise it. . . . Marcia Nardi, here and there in her work, produces a line or two as fine as anything that anyone, man or woman, writing today can boast of. . . . There are lines, I claim nothing else, in that rubble that can have come from nothing other than a fine mind, courage and an emotional force of exceptional power. (*ND Seven*, 413–14)

Nardi resented Williams's special pleading—and patronizing tone. To Williams she wrote, “it embarrassed me, that preface, because in my private struggles and problems I prefer to live anonymously” (O'Neil, 76).

Instead of becoming angry with Williams, however, she became more demanding of his assistance at the very time that Williams was growing exasperated at her inability to find work despite the wartime economy's demand for labor. Though Nardi constantly complained about her impoverished circumstances and voiced a desire for “any secure regular income at all” (O'Neil, 104), she was unwilling to return to the kinds of unfulfilling jobs she had held for many years. She wanted more than an income.

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My great handicap in living (and therefore in writing) has been for a long long time, not my consuming job and financial problems, and not my educational limitations, and not even my emotional frustrations, but only and entirely my lack of any connecting links whatsoever between the operative and inner aspects of my existence—combined with my lack of any intellectual companionship at all from one year to another. . . . [N]o mind can thrive when continually locked in upon itself—especially when it has never experienced (as mine never has) any of those beneficial “influences” in its formative years which play such an important part in the development of people who come from educated families. (O’Neil, 92–93)

This letter went on for eight pages. Near the end she made “a request which I hesitate to make and at the same time must. Will you let me spend an hour or so with you some time very soon—anywhere and any time (I could arrange that for your convenience)?” (O’Neil, 98). She would bring to the meeting for discussion “one or two very short poems” and maybe “a paragraph or two of prose.” She also wanted to talk with him about “one particularly puzzling aspect of my health difficulties” which she suspected may “have psychological roots.”

Apart from those very specific things that I should like so much to talk to you about (those to do with writing being more important to me than the other) I have been almost obsessed with the feeling for at least two weeks now, that this deadness of my mental faculties which I cannot seem to dispel, would immediately vanish if I found myself for an hour or so in the presence of someone whose own mind had a great deal of reality for me—and whose personality too of course since one cannot possibly sever the two. . . . [I]f you can possibly see your way to granting that request I make of you, it would mean a million times more to me than anything you could possibly do for me in purely practical ways—regarding jobs, et cetera. . . . If I should hear from you that you can and will let me see you some time soon, the

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mere prospect of that, I think, would snatch me into life.  
(O'Neil, 99)

After receiving no reply from the wary Williams, two weeks later she sent a three-page letter pleading for him to “come to [her] rescue” (O'Neil, 106). When he still did not reply, ten days later she wrote that she failed to understand what “would cause one person to turn a completely deaf ear to some really urgent life-or-death request of another person” (106) and pleading again that he meet her “for a short while” (107).

Three days after this third letter, she received the following brief note.

My dear Marcia Nardi:

Though I have tried to find work for you I have not succeeded, under present circumstances my best advice would be for you to apply to one of the Federal Employment Bureaus and let them instruct you.

There's nothing more that I can do or say. This brings our correspondence to a close as far as I am concerned.

Yours very truly  
W. C. Williams

Six years later Williams would write about Nardi, “I helped her for a while but found it was too much for me and withdrew after the first year or so” (O'Neil, 162). But she was not yet done with him. Determined to have the “last word” in their correspondence, within the next few weeks Nardi sent Williams three long indignant letters—and one postcard apprising him that she would continue to use his name as a job reference. Williams never answered the letters, but extracted long sections to use in *Paterson*.

Williams claimed that while readying *Paterson* for publication he tried to get in touch with Nardi to obtain written permission to use her letters in his poem. By that time, however, Nardi had

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moved to the country near Woodstock, New York, with John Lang, a painter and short-story writer. She had changed apartments so frequently while in the city, often leaving no forwarding address, that she could not be tracked through the post office. According to Williams, when he finally contacted her family, they asked him if he knew where she was. But in 1949, six years after her last letter to Williams, Nardi came upon the first two books of *Paterson* in a bookstore. When she found her letters within, she immediately wrote to the author to request copies of the books. She told him she was now married, but still impoverished, and suffering from liver and gall bladder troubles. In addition to the books, she told him she could also use “a couple of hundred dollars,” help getting reviewing jobs, maybe a Guggenheim.

Williams replied promptly this time, promising to send books immediately and to “do what I can to come to your rescue” (O’Neil, 137). Though he couldn’t send her “two hundred dollars in an offhand way,” he enclosed twenty dollars as “token of my good will and appreciation for your assistance to me in the past. You’ve had plenty to contend with and I must say I admire your courage and persistence. No use going further into detail” (138). Williams, recalling the cost in settling the libel suit for “The Five Dollar Guy” twenty years before, might have worried about the legal ramifications of using Nardi’s letters without written permission. He sent both Nardi’s letter and a copy of his reply to his publisher, James Laughlin.

With this shaky start began another correspondence between Nardi and Williams that endured for six years. Nardi soon followed her first letter by sending Williams a group of poems written since they had last been in touch. Williams thought them “the best you have ever written,” and with renewed enthusiasm for her talents, for the first time in their correspondence addressed Nardi as “Marcia” and signed himself “Bill.” Over the next six years, he championed her poetry, sent her money, put

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her in contact with others who might help her, tried to get her into Yaddo, and eventually recommended her successfully for a Guggenheim. She responded with letters that chronicled her illness, romantic problems, poverty, and harsh social resentments—but whenever her correspondent seemed to be growing weary or cross with her, she could always woo him back with poems.

How the rich move softly  
Through their injustices,  
Softly as the uncut grasses on summer noons they move—  
That tinkle? It's their cocktail glasses,  
That sound of hatchet blows?  
I do not know,  
For all is interstices  
And open meadowland and willow laces  
To their very gentle wickednesses  
That knuckleless as summer breezes go.

(From "How the Rich Move Softly," *Poems*, 33)

Alan Swallow Press finally published a book of Nardi's poems in 1956, but it received little critical attention. The forty-page volume failed to include most of the twenty-two poems published in the *New Directions* selections of 1942 and 1947, nor any of the poems Nardi wrote before 1942. After this publication, Nardi enjoyed a modest career. In addition to her Guggenheim, she attended the Yaddo and MacDowell colonies and published occasionally in magazines, her last publication being a poem in the *New Yorker* in 1971. But her difficult personality continued to estrange acquaintances; she so harshly and publicly criticized fellow residents at Yaddo and MacDowell that she wore out her welcome at both colonies. In 1968 her son, then forty-two years old, told her he would have no more to do with her unless she would reveal to him his father's name. She refused and, though she lived another twenty years, never saw her son

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again. In late life she returned to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she felt isolated from New York and the literary life she identified with it, and gained an unhappy reputation as a local eccentric. She spent her last years in a nursing home, to which she was tracked by Elizabeth Murrie O'Neil, who edited the volume of letters between Nardi and Williams at the heart of this account. She died in 1990.

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My mind said *giddy-up* all day  
But only time moved  
Only time went away  
The dray  
Horse of my nothingness  
Stayed.

Though morning and noon and the whole afternoon  
To my *giddy-up* galloped away,  
Weighted with lack—  
The void in my loins  
Overloading its back,  
It did not go  
It did not stir  
It only strove and strained,  
And the sun went down  
And the wind blew  
While I remembered the *whoa*  
Of long ago  
When light with having,  
Of time and the wind and all things  
I was the flow.

(*Poems*, 19)