

Task for *Selected Poetry and Prose*

Prose version of 'Death of the Bird'

For every bird there is this last migration: once more the cooling year kindles her heart; with a warm passage to the summer station love pricks the course in lights across the chart. Year after year a speck on the map, divided by a whole hemisphere, summons her to come; season after season, sure and safely guided, going away she is also coming home. And being home, memory becomes a passion with which she feeds her brood and straws her nest, aware of ghosts that haunt the heart's possession and exiled love mourning within the breast. The sands are green with a mirage of valleys; the palm-tree casts a shadow not its own; down the long architrave of temple or palace blows a cool air from moorland scarps of stone. And day by day the whisper of love grows stronger; that delicate voice, more urgent with despair, custom and fear constraining her no longer, drives her at last on the waste leagues of air. A vanishing speck in those inane dominions, single and frail, uncertain of her place, alone in the bright host of her companions, lost in the blue unfriendliness of space, she feels it close now, the appointed season: the invisible thread is broken as she flies; suddenly, without warning, without reason, the guiding spark of instinct winks and dies. Try as she will, the trackless world delivers no way, the wilderness of light no sign, the immense and complex map of hills and rivers mocks her small wisdom with its vast design. And darkness rises from the eastern valleys, and the winds buffet her with their hungry breath, and the great earth, with neither grief nor malice, receives the tiny burden of her death.