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The Marshes of Glynn (1989 Conference Materials)

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THE MARSHES OF GLYNN

Glooms of the five oaks, beautiful-braided and woven
With intricate shades of the vines that myriad-cloven
Clamber the forks of the multiform bough—
Emerald heights—
Virginal sky lights,
Wrought of the leaves to allure to the whisper of waves.
When lowermost singly down through the green oak-pronades
Of the dim sweet woods, of the dear dark woods,
Of the heavenly woods and glades,
That run to the radiant marginal sand-beach within
The wide sea-marshes of Glynn—

Beautiful glooms, soft-dusk in the noon-day fire—
Wildwood privacies, closets of lone desire,
Chamber from chamber parted with waving arms of leaves,
Gells for the passionate pleasure of prayer to the soul
that grieves,
Purer with a sense of the passing of saints through the wood,
Cool for the dulcet weighing of ill with good;—
O braided docks of the oak-and woven shades of the vine
While the riotous noon-day sun of the June day long did shine
Ye held me fast in your heart and I held you in mine,
But now when the noon is no more, and rest is rest,
And the sun is a-wait at the pious gate of the West,
The star yellow beam down the wood-softest dough seem
Like a lane into heaven that leads from a dream,—
Aye, now, when my soul all day hath drunk the soul
of your love,
And my heart is at ease from men, and the wearisome sound of the stroke
Of the skylane of time and the tawdry of trades is low.
And belief overmasters doubt, and I know that I know,
And my spirit is grown to a lurid great compass within,
That the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn
Will work me no fear like the fear they have wrought me of yore.
When length was fatigue and when breadth was but
bitterness sore,
And when terror and shrinking and dreary unnarrable pain
Drew over me out of the merciless miles of the plain—
Oh, now, unafraid, I am fain to face
The vast and vast visage of space.
To the edge of the wood I am drawn, I am drawn,
Where the gray beach glimmering runs, as a bed of the dawn,
For a mete and a mark
To the forest-dark.—

So:
Affable live-oak, leaning low,—
Thus—with your bow—soft, with a sweet scent hand,
That lightly touching your person, Lord of the land!
Bending your beauty aside, with a step I stand
On the firm-packed sand,

By a world of marsh that borders a world of sea.
Sinuous southward and sinuous northward the shimmering sand
Of the sand-beach fastens the fringe of the marsh to the
fields of the land.
Inward and outward to northward and southward the
beach-lines linger and curl
As a silver wrought garment that clings to and follows
The firm sweet limbs of a girl.
Vanishing, swelling, evermore curving again into sight,
Softly the sand-beach wavers away to a dim-grey
looping of light.
And what is behind me westward the wall of the
woods stands high?
The world lies east: now ample, the marsh and the sea
and the sky.
A league and a league of marsh-grass, waist-high,
Green, and all of a height, and unflecked with a light or a shade,
Stretch leisurely off, in a pleasant plain,
To the terminal blue of the main.
Oh, what is abroad in the marsh and the terminal sea?
Somehow my soul seems suddenly free
From the weighing of fate and sad discussion of sin,
By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the
marshes of Glynn.
Ye marshes, how candid and simple and nothing-withholding and free
Ye pour yourself to the sky and offer yourselves to the
sea!
Tolerant plains, that suffer the sea and the rains and the sun,
Ye spread and span like the catholic man who hath
mightily won
God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain
And sight out of blindness and purport out of a stain.
As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the water's sod,
Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God;
I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies
In the freedom that fits at the space 'twixt the marsh
and the skies.
By so many roots as the marsh-grass sends in the sod
I will heartily lay me on hold on the greatness of God:
Oh, like to the greatness of God is the greatness within
The range of the marshes, the liberal marshes of Glynn,

And the sea lends large, as the marsh; io, out of his
plenty the sea
Pours fast: full soon the time of the flood-tide must be;
Look how the grace of the sea doth age
About and about through the intricate channels that flow
Here and there,
Everywhere,
Till his waters have flooded the uttermost creeks and the
low-lying lanes,
And the marsh is meshed with a million veins,
That like as with roses and silvery essences flow
In the rose-and-silver evening glow.
Farewell, my lord Sun!
The creeks overflow, a thousand rivulets run
'Twixt the roots of the sod; the blades of the marsh-grass stir,
Posseth the hurrying sound of wings that westward whirl;
Posseth, and all is still; and the currents cease to run;
And the sea and the marsh are one.

How still the plains of the waters be:
The tide is in his ecstasy.
The tide is at his highest height:
And it is right.

And now from the West of the Lord will the waters of sleep
Roll in on the souls of men,
But who will reveal to our waking ken
The form that swim and the shapes that creep
Under the waters of sleep?

And I would I could know what swimmeth below when
the tide comes in
On the length and the breadth of the marvelous marshes of Glynn.

SIDI~Y LANIER, 1842-1881