

## NEUTRAL TONES

We stood by a pond that winter day,  
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,  
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod,  
--They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove  
Over tedious riddles solved years ago;  
And some words played between us to and fro -  
On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing  
Alive enough to have strength to die;  
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby  
Like an ominous bird a-wing . . .

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,  
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me  
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,  
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

1867.