

## FROST FLOWERS

IT is not long since, here among all these folk  
in London, I should have held myself  
of no account whatever,  
but should have stood aside and made them way  
thinking that they, perhaps,  
had more right than I--for who was I?

Now I see them just the same, and watch them.  
But of what account do I hold them?

Especially the young women. I look at them  
as they dart and flash  
before the shops, like wagtails on the edge of a  
pool.

If I pass them close, or any man,  
like sharp, slim wagtails they flash a little aside  
pretending to avoid us; yet all the time  
calculating.

They think that we adore them--alas, would it  
were true!

Probably they think all men adore them,

howsoever they pass by.

What is it, that, from their faces fresh as spring,  
such fair, fresh, alert, first-flower faces,  
like lavender crocuses, snowdrops, like Roman  
    hyacinths,  
scyllas and yellow-haired hellebore, jonquils, dim  
    anemones,  
even the sulphur auriculas,  
flowers that come first from the darkness, and feel  
    cold to the touch,  
flowers scentless or pungent, ammoniacal almost;  
what is it, that, from the faces of the fair young  
    women  
comes like a pungent scent, a vibration beneath  
that startles me, alarms me, stirs up a repulsion?

They are the issue of acrid winter, these first-  
    flower young women;  
their scent is lacerating and repellent,  
it smells of burning snow, of hot-ache,  
of earth, winter-pressed, strangled in corruption;  
it is the scent of the fiery-cold dregs of corruption,  
when destruction soaks through the mortified,  
    decomposing earth,  
and the last fires of dissolution burn in the bosom

of the ground.

They are the flowers of ice-vivid mortification,  
thaw-cold, ice-corrupt blossoms,  
with a loveliness I loathe;  
for what kind of ice-rotten, hot-aching heart  
must they need to root in!