Seasons of the Heart

By Agnes Dodds Kinard

SARA Henderson Hay, author of six volumes of award-winning poetry, is often called a Pittsburgh poet, but her work speaks to the concerns of people everywhere. She herself often insisted that she was a poet who just happened to live in Pittsburgh.

Hailed in 1966 by long-time Pittsburgh history writer Robert Alberts as "one of the nation's foremost poets," she was the great-granddaughter of Alexander Hay, mayor of the city from 1842 to 1844. She was born November 13, 1906, in Pittsburgh to Major Ralph Watson Hay and Daisy Baker Hay of Anniston, Alabama. Sara Henderson spent her early childhood years in smoky, industrial Pittsburgh, and made numerous visits with her mother to relatives in Anniston. The visits became more and more frequent, and finally Sara Henderson, her sister Willa, and their mother remained in Anniston and lived with Daisy Baker Hay's mother. The father corresponded faithfully, sending regular checks, and there was no divorce. Spending her formative adolescence in the South, with its leisurely pace, was a permanent influence on the poet. Throughout her life, even in business letters, she was gracious and charming in the southern manner. In keeping with southern custom, she was called "Sara Henderson," instead of "Sara."

A collection of her business papers, a diary and scrapbooks with press clippings covering the highlights of her career was willed to Hunt Library at Carnegie Mellon University, and the excerpts for this article were drawn from that material. Three years before her death in 1987 at age 80, Sara Henderson Hay wrote a letter that was read at ceremonies marking the 85th anniversary of the Wilkinsburg Library in suburban Pittsburgh:

Since my early childhood, the written word, in books, has always had for me an utter magic. Long before I could read, my mother read to me, mostly poetry, the sonorous rhythms of Evangeline, the lovely and now out of fashion lines of Tennyson and Swinburne, even Shakespeare... Poetry was my first love...

And when I could read myself... the Carnegie Library (in Anniston) was where I spent a charmed time, heading to it when school was out, and on Saturday mornings standing bemused, trying to choose which of all that wealth of high adventure, fantasy, romance and exotic far away places and lives I could take home with me... I don't know whether children today find a book the marvelous thing it was before radio, television and movies were available. I hope they do.

By age 10, Sara Henderson was a "published poet," receiving $20 for a poem about golf published in Judge magazine. In June 1921 she earned a grade school diploma from the Thomas Wightman School in Pittsburgh. She attended high school in Anniston, and her mother continued to send her poems to the Anniston Star, which had come to consider her its protege. At Brenau College in Georgia, Sara Henderson edited the college magazine as a freshman. Transferring to Columbia University, her writing was honed under the tutelage of professors John Erskine, Joseph Auslander and Hoxie Fairchild. Her poems appeared in the college magazine and the publication of the Parnassus Club, for young women where she lived and waited tables for her room and board of $16 per week. She received her degree in 1929.

In 1931 alone four anthologies included her poetry: Selected Magazine Verse for 1931, Younger Poets, Anthology of Garden Verse and Columbia University Poets. Through Harold Vinal, editor of Voices: A Journal of Poetry, which also published her work, she was introduced to New York literary circles and joined The Poetry Society of America.

Her first selection of 66 poems was chosen in a contest from among 207 entries and was published as a book in 1933 by Kaleidograph Press. The Field of Honor was dedicated to "One Who Never Laughed at me, and To One Who Did" — her mother and Hoxie Fairchild, respectively. The title

Agnes Dodds Kinard, a native Pittsburgher and author of Celebration of Carnegie in Pittsburgh, expects to publish a book of Sara Henderson Hay's poems dealing with biblical subjects. Material for this article was drawn from the book manuscript. The author wishes to thank Mary Kay Johnsen, Special Collections Librarian, and her assistant, Angeline Levis, at Carnegie Mellon University's Hunt Library, and Thomas J. Michalak, Director of University Libraries.

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for the critically acclaimed collection was chosen from the title of a tripartite poem about love foresworn for honor. One poem, reflecting her lifelong love of animals, most requested for republication is:

*For a Dead Kitten*

Put the rubber mouse away,  
Pick the spools up from the floor,  
What was velvet-shod, and gay,  
Will not want them, any more —

What was warm, is strangely cold.  
Whence dissolved the little breath?  
How could this small body hold  
So immense a thing as Death?

After graduation from Columbia, Sara Henderson Hay worked at Charles Scribner’s & Sons, first as a secretary in the editorial offices, then in the bookstore and later in the Rare Book Department, while doing free-lance proofreading and editing. She carefully aimed her poems so rejections were few: biblical poems appeared in the *Churchman* and similar publications, while the *New Yorker* published her witty, wordy verses.

One editorial job she enjoyed most was editing and proofreading a gigantic volume, Burton E. Stevenson’s *Home Book of Shakespeare Quotations*. Being “a pushover for a quotation,” the poet recognized them “as among the richest lodes in all the mines of literature” and collected her own treasury of “things supremely well said, witty, wise, kindly or malicious, that can be lifted out of context and admired for themselves or applied wherever suitable.”

Much of her poetry shows this fascination with Shakespeare and other classicists, super-imposed on a firm foundation of stories, parables and verses from the King James Bible, which her mother read as lullabys to her as a child. In notes for one of her readings, the poet wrote that “the marvelous imagery of the King James Old and New Testaments... made a deep impression on me.... Of course the Holy Family, from the angle of their human-ness, offer endless material for thought....”

In her volumes the poet expressed her love of nature, her concern for the underdog, her love of love and her distrust of it. Her verses display a vibrant warmth, and we are fortunate that her ideas about creating poetry have been preserved in her collection at Hunt Library. As early as the mid-1950s, she observed that “what is apt to come under fire today is not the technical pattern of a poem, but any tendency of its author to be warmly and directly and candidly emotional.

“Ingenuous and uncomplicated sentiment is, in these days, very likely to be mis-called sentimentality.” The two, insisted the poet, are “something very different indeed.”

Several newspapers besides the *Anniston Star* followed Sara Henderson Hay’s early career, including the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Birmingham News Age Herald*. Both papers commented on her beauty and charm, as well as her poetry, as she traveled the South receiving accolades and promoting her books.

A syndicated columnist for the Birmingham paper, Gladys Baker (no relation), who was a Barbara Walters of the day, gave the 28-year-old poet the opportunity to experience the high adventure and exotic travel that she had fantasized about during her childhood reading sessions at the library. Gladys Baker was a renowned interviewer of George Bernard Shaw, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Babe Ruth and other luminaries of the 1930s, and she engaged the poet as her secretary and companion. On assignment for the *New York Times*, the pair began a trip in April 1935 that would take them across much of Europe.
Arriving in Turkey on May 18, they registered at the Park Hotel, Istanbul's newest. "Having late dinner. President Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) came in!" Sara Henderson Hay noted in her diary. "With all his entourage, generals, Deputies, etc... Invited us over to his table (luckily we had evening clothes on), seated us one at his right, one on his left..." Ataturk, she wrote, "knew who Gladys was, and she made the most terrific impression! He talked with her, through his secretary, until seven in the morning. In the meantime, we'd danced, and breakfast was served as the sunlight came over the Bosphorus. Remarkable man, drank raki all night long and we'd never have known it. (Bed at 9:30 a.m.)"

The interview appeared under the Times headline: "War Peril Great, Ataturk Declares;" Ataturk was quoted as saying that "in event of war in the area the United States could not remain aloof or neutral."

The Turkish dictator's influence extended to Rumania, where the women also were received as official guests. Interviewed there were the former international playboy King Carol, Queen Marie and others in the royal family. In Austria, Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg declared in an interview that the Nazi movement in his country was kept alive by outside propagandists and financial support from across the German border.

Scheduled interviews with top Nazi leaders — Hitler, Goering and Goebbels — fell through because the three were out of Berlin. The young assistant wrote in her diary that she wished she knew the city's undercurrents. "On the surface all is quiet and very peaceful. It's hard to realize that this Germany is the country that everyone in the world is watching with distrust and fear. We don't even see many soldiers on the street.

"When we came into Germany we were awfully nervous about our notes — remembering all the newspaper stories of people thrown into jail for criticizing the Nazis. The night before we got into Berlin we went through (our) papers, put the negative ones in an envelope in the bottom of the office — probably a suitcase separate from their trunks and other bags — "and I wore the others inside my vest!... We got the papers in without any trouble."

In Rome, interviews with Pope Pius XI and Mussolini were granted. Asked on June 23, 1935, about the potential for Italy waging war in Abyssinia, Mussolini briddled and replied: "I said Italy will never perpetrate war, but her colonies must be defended." Soon afterwards Italian planes were strafing Ethiopian warriors in their African tribal battle finery.

Mixed with the talk of war in the diary are mentions of social events, such as the opera Aida in Vienna and a Beethoven concert in London: "All this music is good for me, and what's more, I like it." Before boarding the S.S. Normandie for the United States, the correspondents visited London's Cheshire Cheese, a pub dating to 1669 and haunted by Johnson, Goldsmith and later literary notables.

Sara Henderson Hay returned to Scribner's, writing poetry and reviewing poetry and fiction for the Saturday Review of Literature and other magazines. Her second book, This My Letter, was published by Alfred A. Knopf, in 1939, with the title from a line by John Donne. The book was dedicated to Raymond Holden. As a Saturday Review editor, he had turned down what she considered some of her most profound poems, preferring to print those about her "small son." She went to a lecture at which Raymond Holden was the speaker. In an interview with the Anniston Star, the poet recalled that he had asked, "How is your small son, Mrs. Hay?" "It isn't Mrs. Hay. I'm not married, you see." Then, laughing at the editor's raised eyebrows, she added, "and I haven't any son. Mr. Holden, you, a poet, should know that having brain children now and then is our license."

The exact date of the first meeting with Holden, a 1915 Princeton graduate, poet, and author of an Abraham Lincoln biography, was not recorded. But on May 9, 1937, they were married by a justice of the peace in Greenwich, Connecticut. It was his third marriage.

Other readers also believed in the son's existence, so moving were her verses. Toys, cookies and other gifts were sent to the poet "mother." Fifteen poems in This My Letter involved the imagery child, such as "Following the Small Son to Church" and:

To My Small Son, Growing Up
'But when I become a man, I put away childish things...

I Corinthians 13: 11

God grant he may not lose them yet,
All of the little childish things.
I cannot bear that he forget
His young and brave imaginings.

That, growing up, he loses them quite:
The splendid marching days that pass,
The Pirate in the wind at night,
The curious, friendly-fingered grass.

Is it such wisdom, that he can
At so great price become a man?

The book received laudatory reviews. In the New York Herald Tribune Books of October 9,
1939, Ruth Lechlitner commented that “as in her first book... Miss Hay’s best poems are those based on religious subjects or biblical references. The lyrics in the concluding pages of This My Letter have a beautiful simplicity, candor, homely tenderness, with an ironic insight that turns their edges sharply from the sentimental.”

In letters and lectures, the poet explained her interest in biblical subjects: “I found myself troubled by the predicaments that many of the characters found themselves in... and I couldn’t help but be somewhat taken aback by the quite implacable punishment occasionally dealt out by Jehovah.” She wondered about Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son Isaac: “What was the effect of the experience on the little boy...?”

She was curious about overlooked biblical characters, as well: “the innocent bystanders, so to speak, who witnessed the miracles, who saw Jesus pass by and who went on their way. I’ve often wondered what became of them, whether they remembered anything about the experience, or Him....” She wished “to speak a word in the defence of some of those whom I felt had been rather put upon, the under dogs, the misunderstood or unfairly treated, those made an example of....”

Although critics singled out the volume’s biblical poems for praise, it contained poems that helped to establish other themes that Sara Henderson Hay would return to throughout her career:

**The Song**
*(for R.H.)*

Love you is like hearing a sound breaking
In a great wave of music on the ears:
The exquisite movement of music that brings tears
To the eyes, too beautiful to be borne, waking
Such rapture in the breast as wrings the heart.
Oh sweet, oh most beloved, this loving you
Is music, but more than music — having no part
With ceasing, with dying away as melodies do,
Having some quality more pure and strong,
More passionate and durable and true
To sound across my days my whole life long
Its breathing cadence, its enduring song.

But the song did not endure. The marriage ended in divorce in 1949, the year this poem was written:

**Residence: Washoe County, Nevada...**

Weep no more, my lady, this gaudy city
Blossoms for you beneath those out-size stars;
Here no one cares, and there’s no room for pity
Around the gambling tables and at the bars.

The lightening fingered men with the open collars
Can deal more quickly than your eyes can move
And here they give your change in silver dollars,
Heavy as hearts are, and more lasting than love.

The lawyer finishes, even while you speak,
Making his notes. He’s heard it all before.
All that to you was terrible and unique
Is an old story, lady: weep no more,
In six weeks you can lay your burden down,
Down by the Riverside Hotel, in town.

In notes from one of her readings, she said many poems add “to the lineaments of the Self Portrait which all books of poetry really are. Not all poems are autobiographical or even from the poet’s personal experience,” she said, but the importance of such poems could be seen “to the discerning eye which reads between the lines.”

With the world’s attention riveted on the global struggle of the early 1940s, Sara Henderson Hay's poetry voiced many Americans' preoccupation with the war. “Black Out,” minus the first verse, appeared in the *New Yorker*. “Blood Donor” and “To the Nazi Leaders” were printed in the *New York Herald Tribune*. They all evoke the feelings and fears of the era.

**To the Nazi Leaders**

“The evil that men do...”

The evil these men did in their dark time
I ies after them in their infected state
They were the leaders, but the people’s crime
Is that they followed and they called them great.

These are the men whose monstrous alchemy
Gave what is worst in all a shape and name —
What ailed the people, but the people's crime
Corruption’s color and the face of shame?

These were the leaders — they were fortunate
Because they shall not live more lives than one
To look upon the work their hands have done.
These are the people who must expiate
The guilt they shared when they did not disdain
The bloody hand and fellowship of Cain.

One poem, “The Neighbors,” published in *Good Housekeeping* in 1943, was attacked by some religious organizations for surmising what might have been the reaction of neighbors of Mary and Joseph to their Son’s degrading crucifixion between thieves. In the controversial passage an imaginary
neighbor says of Jesus, “He’d a’ been a better son if he’d stayed home and raised a family like his brothers done.” The Acolyte, the official organ of the National Organization for Decent Literature sponsored by Bishop John F. Noll, called the use of “brothers” blasphemous.

Evidently the The Acolyte’s editors took their objection up with Good Housekeeping editors, who apologized to Bishop Noll. The inside story on the brouhaha was detailed by Drew Pearson, in his syndicated column “Merry Go Round” of March 25, 1943. But according to George Seldes’ magazine, In Fact, newspapers in many parts of the country suppressed the column. Clippings in Sara Henderson Hay’s scrapbook related the episode.

These years were full of crises and conflicts for the poet. Her third book, published in 1951 by Scribner’s, contained only 42 poems. Dedicated to her mother, The Delicate Balance received the Edna St. Vincent Millay Memorial Award from The Poetry Society of America. The title was contained in the last verse of the poem, “Bottle Should Be Plainly Labeled Poison”:

There is a delicate balance set Between Hope’s virtue and its vice The man who takes it to forget Must know how little will suffice.

The strengths of The Delicate Balance were evident. New York Times critic Robert Hayden wrote: “One is impressed by the poet’s moral earnestness, insight and by her feeling of irony and paradox.... One of Miss Hay’s assets is her skillfulness in fusing the serious and the humorous in the same poem.” Another eminent critic, Louis Untermeyer, said about the book: “It not only lives up to but completely illustrates its title. Delicacy is the keynote of these poems, but it is a delicacy balanced between frail whimsicality and fine-spun strength....”

The poet, in her business papers, outlined the strict standards and disciplined thought that underlay the delicacy of her verse: “A poem should be able to recreate in the mind of its reader as nearly as possible what the poet felt when he wrote it.” She sought “a line or two or three lines embodying the central idea of the point of the poem.” The point, she added, “need not be stated directly; it may be presented subtly or obliquely or by suggestion or by allusion or metaphor, but what it says should never, in essence, be confused or incompletely realized by the its author, or be undisciplined and full of loose inconsistencies which sound impressive but cannot bear analysis.”

Receiving a fellowship to pursue her writing, Sara Henderson Hay spent the summer of 1950 at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where she met widower Nikolai Lopatnikoff, also a resident there. The Russian-American composer of classical music, twice a Guggenheim fellow, was a professor of composition in the Department of Music at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh.

Born in Estonia in 1903, Lopatnikoff had lived in Finland, Germany and France before arriving in the United States in 1939, becoming an American citizen on D-Day, 1944. Educated as a civil engineer like his father, Lopatnikoff composed his first symphony while studying in Germany. A
sonata for violin and strings, written in 1948, was published in 1951 with a dedication to Sara Henderson Hay. The couple married in New York in January of that year, and then returned to the bride’s city of birth to make their home at 5448 Bartlett Street on the edge of Schenley Park. Their garden attracted rabbits and squirrels, while in the house there was always at least one resident cat.

Although her husband did not write music to accompany her poems, a number of others did. One of the first was Kenneth Walton, who in 1939 wrote music for “Mary — Sacred Song.” Among her other biblical poems set to music were “The Ten Lepers,” “Bethlehem,” “While Joseph Slept,” “The Silent Ones,” “The Gifts,” and “The Child.”

The Carnegie Mellon association resulted in 34 of her poems being teamed with a varied group of musical scores by CMU Professor Roland Leich. Sometimes serious, sometimes playful, some were orchestral and some were for male chorus or Pittsburgh’s Mendelssohn Choir. One of the most amusing was the 1956 transposition of the poem “For a Dead Kitten” into a funeral march! The collaboration also resulted in a work for voice and strings, with support in 1979 from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. A composer the couple encountered at the MacDowell Colony was Paul Amadeus Pisk, a former student of Arnold Schoenberg in Austria. Around 1958 Pisk composed music for nine poems by Sara Henderson Hay.

There were interesting collaborations throughout her career. At the invitation of Samuel Hazo, director of the International Poetry Forum, she contributed verses for a musical composition, “The Pickle Suite.” It was premiered by Robert Bou-

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II

I do beseech that you believe me true,
And cry your solace in my desperate need.
My dearest love, I had been false indeed
If I did not this bitter thing I do.
Better a thousand times the anguish due,
The heart insolvent, but the spirit freed,
Than turn thus traitor to a certain creed,
And faithless to myself, as well as you.

For it were surely treachery most base
To risk the sullying of so proud a shield;
To chance a single stain upon the face
Of what we bear in honor from the field,
Worthy to keep untarnished through the years,
Though polished daily with what need of tears.

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III

Strange paradox, my friend, that you and I
Who deemed our trusted strength so sure and sweet,
Must find ourselves stricken to earth thereby,
Our swords turned sharply to our own defeat.
“Wisdom” writ large across the frozen breast
Is doubtful comfort when the heart is breaking;
What final irony is manifest:
That we are scourged with throngs of our own making.

So I shall nevermore behold your face,
Nor look for heaven at your fingertips,
And all my ordered goings shall attest
How I have set mine honor in its place!
Albeit by the blood upon my lips,
Albeit by the ashes in my breast.

— lead poem in the book by the same title, 1933.

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Nikolai and Sally Lopatnikoff (the poet continued publishing under “Sara Henderson Hay”) returned to the MacDowell Colony two summers in the 1950s, but it was in 1959 at the Huntington Hartford Foundation in Pacific Palisades, California, (a west coast equivalent to the MacDowell Colony) that she wrote 18 poems for her next volume. That year the University of Pittsburgh Press published The Stone and The Shell, the press’ first book of poetry. It received the Pegasus Award

The book was dedicated to the poet’s husband, and in publicity, as well as on the book’s cover, she requested that it be noted that she was “the wife of Nikolai Lopatnikoff, the noted Russian American composer and professor of music at Carnegie Mellon Institute of Technology.”

In mid-1959 a three column review of the book appeared in the Pittsburgh Press. Yvonne Wallace described the ambience of the Lopatnikoffs’ home and noted the placement of a ridged rock by the poet that resembled the touchstone at Steepletop, the home of Edna St. Vincent Millay. “Like Emily Dickinson who ‘could see heaven in a grain of sand,’ Sally finds metaphysical meaning in stones, shells, animals, people,” Wallace wrote. “Her province is the world of nature and man’s relation to that world, to his gods and to his fellow creatures.”

In her own papers, the poet elaborated: “Rhythm is a part of man’s very life; he has always carried on his life in accord with the obvious and regular alternations of day and night, and the fixed sequences of the seasons. Rhythm is in his heart beat and his breath and his pulse. We tend to speak rhythmically; and to see things in patterns and order.” She described her preference for a poetic landscape with “figures — human or bird or beast or... stones and shells,” and she was “inclined to look for some tie-up with human nature... because I recongize in myself that age-old instinct of man to identify, to attach himself to the world about him, to stake his claim in Time.”

One poem in the fourth book was:

**The Enemy**

It was not grief I died of, no, nor love,  
Not even when he set his heel upon my heart;  
Nor any crowding fury that could move  
Within my breast to tear my breast apart.  
Not thirst, nor starving want, nor bitter need  
Accomplished my demise, nor wounds unmended,  
So long as these could wring me, then indeed  
I was alive; by no such means was ended.

None of these things contrived to bring me low.  
Time, whom I trusted, was my deadly foe,  
And he it was whose daily anodyne  
Numbed the live nerve itself against the living pain  
And stilled the rage, and quenched, and fed, and  
Healed me  
Of all my hurts and, with the healing, killed me.

The poet also wrote prose. The work of another Pittsburgh-born poet, Robinson Jeffers, contained strong nature and metaphysics themes, and Sara Henderson Hay examined his work in an article in Famous Men and Women of Pittsburgh, published in 1981. Early in her career she had a short mystery story published in Ellery Queen Magazine but decided the short story was not her province.

In a Carnegie Tech Quarterly article in 1961 she recounted Pittsburgh’s role in “what is probably the wittiest and best sustained literary hoax of our times....” The hoax began in 1916 with the appearance of Spectra: New Poems by Emanuel Morgan and Anne Knish — far out verse praised by many leading critics. Sketchy biographies in the book claimed the authors were Pittsburghers, but no Pittsburghers had heard of them. The article revealed that the real authors were the brilliant young poets Witter Byner and Arthur Davison Ficke, who, “outraged by the charlatanism of some of the new ‘schools’... produced a deliberate parody to render such schools and critics patenty ridiculous. (... in some ten days of hilarious industry, helped by ten quarts of excellent scotch.)”

To handle the flood of correspondence caused by the book’s success, the conspirators enlisted the aid of the wife of Edmond Esquerre, then professor of chemistry at Carnegie Tech. Posing as Morgan, she replied for nearly two years to letters, questions about the “Spectrists” and requests for more poems, which Byner supplied.

Edgar Lee Masters called the Spectrict theory “an idea capable of great creative development...” and Harvard professor Amy Lowell, distrustful at the beginning, eventually recommended the volume to students. The episode, Sara Henderson Hay concluded, “cleared the air of a great deal of poetic pretension and attitudinizing....”

She was among those who criticized “obscurist” poetry. “As you may have gathered from my various reviews, and if you have read any of my own work,” she wrote to a budding Idaho poet in 1942, “I am not a follower of the obscurist school of poetry. The poetry which means most to me says something to me directly and clearly; it doesn’t leave me groping in a fog of high-sounding abstractions and esoteric allusions.” She admitted she was not a good judge of highly impressionistic verse that had come to dominate modern poetry. Instead, she sought “to strike an answering chord” in readers by building her poems around the “universals of human experience: love, grief, the tragedy of war, the mysteries of life and death.”

*Story Hour* was Sara Henderson Hay’s fifth volume, published by Doubleday in 1963. It was dedicated to her sister and differed from her earlier
works in that only one poem had a biblical reference and that the volume had a dominant theme: a critical look at the psychological and moral values inherent in familiar fairy tales such as “Jack and the Beanstalk,” “The Three Little Pigs,” “Blue Beard,” etc. The book’s title was that of a poem which appeared in McCall’s in 1959:

**Story Hour**

He swung the axe, the toppling beanstalk fell.  
Hurrah, Hurrah for Jack, the self-reliant.  
The townsfolk gathered to wish him well.  
Was no one sorry for the murdered giant?  
Did no one, as the news spread far and wide,  
Protest the means Jack took to gold and glory:  
Guile, trespass, robbery and homicide?  
It is not mentioned in the popular story.

Dear Child, leave off such queries and suggestions,  
And let that gullible innocence prevail  
Which, in the Brother Grimms’ and our own time,  
Applauds the climber, and ignores crime.  
How requisite to every fairy tale  
A round-eyed listener, with no foolish questions.

**Syndicated Column**

Dear Worried: Your husband’s actions aren’t unique,  
His jealousy’s a typical defense.  
He feels inadequate, in consequence,  
He broods. (My column, by the way, last week Covered the subject fully.) I suggest  
You reassure him; work a little harder  
To build his ego, stimulate his ardor.  
Lose a few pounds, and try to look your best.  
As for his growing a beard, and dyeing it blue,  
Merely a bid for attention; nothing wrong with him.  
Stop pestering him about that closet, too.  
If he wants to keep it locked, why go along with him.  
Just be the girl he married; don’t nag, don’t pout.  
Cheer up. And let me know how things work out.

Many of the poems in Story Hour were sought for republication in anthologies, textbooks and other educational materials for use in high schools and other classes. “The Builders,” a take-off on “The Three Little Pigs,” was one of the most often reprinted. The psychological themes were taken up by doctors and psychiatrists and used as texts for papers presented at medical conventions by for instance, Dr. Richard Day, head of Pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

In a letter to the poet, Ogden Nash wrote, “Your verses were the first that have stimulated me into emitting a quote in many years....”

Seven of the book’s poems were choreographed into a ballet which opened in Washington, D.C.,

**The Nightmare**

“and Abraham... bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar... and took the knife to slay his son.”

*Genesis 22: 9-10*

He wakens, strangling in his tears,  
Again, poor child, I hear him scream  
And cannot go to calm his fears.  
I am the reason for the dream.

Mine is the nightmare step, the voice,  
And mine the nightmare hands that swim  
Out of the blackness toward his face —  
I am the one who corners him.

He brought me flowers in his fists  
To deck the altar I had made.  
Even when I bound his childish wrists  
He thought it was a game we played!

Oh never in his little life  
Had he met fear in any guise —  
He looked upon a naked knife;  
He read my purpose in my eyes.

Weeping, he wakes. His mother goes  
To comfort him. I make no sign.  
He trembles if I come too close,  
He will not trust his hand to mine.

— from *A Footing on This Earth*, 1966.
and played through 1970. Washington Post reviewer Jean Battey applauded the Ethel Butler Company for its premiere of the “marvelous dance work,” calling it “one of the most interesting works I have seen produced on the Washington scene... set to some bitter and biting parodies of nursery rhymes and stories.”

Story Hour poems also provided inspiration for the popular NBC television program “That Was the Week That Was,” featuring Burr Tilstrom with his hand puppets. “The Only Son,” about Tom Thumb, with its anti-mom message, was the topic of one program. A live interview with Barbara Walters on “The Today Show” also helped to promote the book.

The poet said she mined nursery rhymes and fairy tales because they provided “familiar dramatic personae.” Her poems were not “for children, and though they are ostensibly light verse, they are really in deadly earnest, because I wanted to point out in these extraordinary situations and curious ethics and moralities a parallel in contemporary human nature.”

As Story Hour spread her name, Governor William Scranton in 1963 honored her as a “Distinguished Daughter of Pennsylvania.” Three years later came her last book, A Footing on This Earth, published by Doubleday. That year Pittsburgh Quote called her one of the nation’s foremost poets, and the Anniston Star — in her other “hometown” — editorialized: “Miss Hay’s delightful sense of humour must have been tickled to find herself listed, along with steel mills, rivers, great buildings, fields and mountains, as a municipal asset, but... Pittsburgh is to be commended on its wisdom in surveying its ‘natural assets.’ We are proud to claim our share of one.”

The book was dedicated to her mother and the memory of her father, who had died in 1938. In a letter to her publisher, the poet noted that “Footing came out before Mother was taken ill — She was very happy about it.” The Quote article probably was sent to the Anniston Star by Daisy Baker Hay, the last of 60 years of news items she supplied the paper about her daughter.

The official bulletin of The Poetry Society of America in February 1967 said of Footing:

These poems (almost 200 of them) range over a period of 34 years, a good record in survival for a poet. Miss Hay’s competence has been evident throughout these years... She is a mistress of the quick quatrain, the small pithy image, the traditional lyric posture. She has wit, deftness, and is always ladylike and charming.

Reviewer Edith Lovejoy Pierce said in Christian World that the book was:

only one step below the first rung of Jacob’s ladder.... Her light verse is deceptively knotty.... Her religious poetry asks pointed questions. Always sensitive to human sorrows and problems, she takes the part of Man (or perhaps more accurately Woman) against God, or God as he is often inadequately conceived in a rather simplistic reading of the Bible. But whether or not one quarrels with her theology on occasion, one cannot fault her on the expression of it, which is sometimes startling and often moving. How far is poetic license allowed in biblical interpretation? Very far, this poet must admit! This book speaks mainly to exiles from Eden of whom there are more abroad than most authors and publishers seem willing to acknowledge.

Into the 1960s and 1970s Sara Henderson Hay accepted invitations to speak and read her poems to a wide variety of audiences, including poetry societies, libraries, alumnae groups, church groups, and university associations nationwide. (Audio recordings of some of her readings are at Farleigh Dickinson College and the Library of Congress.) She also wrote book reviews for magazines and was generous with advice to aspiring poets.

It is a pity, I think, that this fear of being old-fashioned or sentimental can persuade a poet to abandon a natural simplicity for a contrived complexity... The contemporary saying, ‘Do your own thing’ is good advice, if you are sure it is your own thing... I’ve always felt it unfair for a poem to appear, as they sometimes do today, to be merely the rough materials of a poem, the jotted down notes, the unorganized stuff which the poet hasn’t taken the time or trouble to sort out, but depended on the reader to draw his own conclusions as to the meaning. This kind of improvisation is present in a great deal of contemporary art — music, painting, sculpture, as well as in poetry.

For artists to be able to communicate well, she added, required “a quality of receptive attention, of alert interest, of active participation.”

The Lopatnikoffs were prominent in the cultural life of Pittsburgh; the “society pages” of the newspapers reported what Sally Lopatnikoff wore at the opening symphony concert of the season and so on. She chaired “The Silhouettes,” a musical lecture series about forthcoming programs of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Nikolai Lopatnikoff was a featured speaker at an event related to his compositions to be performed by the Symphony under the direction of Dr. William Steinberg.

In 1969 his retirement from teaching freed the couple to travel more frequently in Europe, which they enjoyed until his death in 1976 after 25 years of marriage.

The poet continued accepting invitations to
The Neighbors

“And he ... came into his own country ... and when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach ... and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? ... Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”

Mark 6: 1-4

News of the trouble in Jerusalem,
His trial, and the manner of his death,
Came to his own village, and to his neighbors,
The people of Nazareth.

They talked. “His mother’ll take it pretty hard.
She set great store by him — though I must say
He treated her, at least to my way of thinking,
In a mighty high-handed way.”

“Why, you remember the time, he was just a boy,
He give them such a scare?
Lost himself three days in Jerusalem
And never turned a hair

When they found him, but answered back, as cool as your please,
He was doing his father’s business, or some such truck,
As if most of us hadn’t known his father, Joseph,
Since he was knee high to a duck.

And his business was carpentry, not talking back to priests!”

“But Mary, she always remembered it. Some claim
She was a little bit touched — had visions and all —
Before he came.”

“She was always partial to him, but if you ask me
He’d a been a better son
If he’d stayed home and raised a family
Like his brothers done.”

“The trouble with him, he didn’t use his judgment.
He was forever speaking out,
Though many’s the time I’ve told him: there’s some wrong things
Folks just don’t talk about.”

“They say, though, in some parts of the country
He drew quite a crowd. Five thousand or more. I don’t know —
Here in Nazareth nobody’d walk two blocks to hear him,
And it probably ain’t so.”

“It’s hard on his family, the disgrace and all.
And I’m sorry about him. I was his friend.
I liked him, you understand. But I always said
He’d come to a bad end.”

— Good Housekeeping, 1943.
speak until 1978, when she wrote disappointed administrators at Bellarmine College in Louisville, Kentucky, that “believing with Emily Dickinson that ‘capacity to terminate is a specific grace....’ I choose to bow out while both I myself and my audience enjoy the performance.”

Recognition continued. In 1980 The Kentucky Poetry Review published a special “sara henderson hay” issue, with an introduction citing her many honors, and in 1982 the University of Arkansas Press published a new edition of Story Hour which included several hitherto unpublished poems. A tribute written by her to Pittsburgh’s Three Rivers Arts Festival was reprinted in the 1982 Celebration of Carnegie.

When her brother-in-law, Kenneth Godfrey, died in 1984, the poet sent her sister these verses, read at his memorial service. (One wonders if the lines were formed at the time of Nikolai’s death.)

“to love and cherish, till Death us do part...”
Marriage Ceremony

Why do we date this love
“Till Death us do part”?  
There is no sundering
Heart and pledged heart.

Once a heart utter known,
Utterly given,
Think, could it walk alone
On earth, in heaven?

Even if flesh and bone
Fall to their sleep
Surely what Love has known
Memory can keep.

Safe, till the dark be past,
Till, on some shore,
Those we have briefly lost
Meet us once more.

Why must we date this bond
“Till Death us do part”?
They are not loosed beyond
Heart and pledged heart.

Finding the responsibility of maintaining her house and garden increasingly difficult, with her 80th birthday approaching, she put the property on the market and quickly sold it. She was spared the exhausting and sad experience of having to vacate her home of 36 years by her quiet death in her sleep July 7, 1987. In accordance with her wishes the burial service was simple and brief, with just two of her poems read. But one mourner at the cemetery noticed the beauty of the butterfly hovering among the flowers and remarked that “Sally would have liked that,” which so fit the lines of “Little Prayer” read by the minister of the Church of the Redeemer. Sally wrote this poem years earlier in memory of her mother.

Little Prayer

Because she loved the colored skies,
The gold, the bronze, the scarlet leaf,
And all bright flowers and vivid wings,
Lord, when she wakes in Paradise,
As wake she will, past age and grief,
Give her again those gay-clad things
That pleased her here; and let her choose
For raiment there no robe of white,
But one made of all rainbow hues —
Such as You lent for her delight
Before the coming of the night.

Her obituary in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette recalled her illustrious career and referred to a 1959 interview: “Describing her method of writing, she said she would mull over an idea, ‘usually getting the last line first.’ She would craft the poem and put it aside for a few days. ‘Then I come back and pounce on it to see it freshly before revisions and final typing.’”

Letters to the editor from friends and admirers such as Helen Moore, creator of the program “Voices From Afar” on WQED, Pittsburgh’s public television station, noted her charming wit, quoting the limerick about Liszt and The Countess. John D. Paulus, former book editor of the Pittsburgh Press, concluded: “Sara Henderson Hay’s poems will be among those that will live, to give future generations a glimpse of life in America in the 20th century.”

The poet wrote her own farewell more than 50 years before death silenced her voice. It appeared as the first poem in her first book and again in her last book, providing the title A Footing on This Earth.

Dedication For a Book

I shall not lose a footing on this earth
So long as any song of mine remain:
Essential substance of my heart and brain
The valuation of my honest worth!
More of my Self will move in word and line
Than ever walked abroad in flesh and bone —
Herein am I most intimately known,
Whoever reads may be a friend of mine!

He shall perceive that I was gay, and candid,
And not too-trustful in my heart’s behalf;
That I was obstinate, and open-handed,
And held no grudges, and was quick to laugh;
That, clinging stubbornly to hope and breath,
I had no enmity at all for Death!