

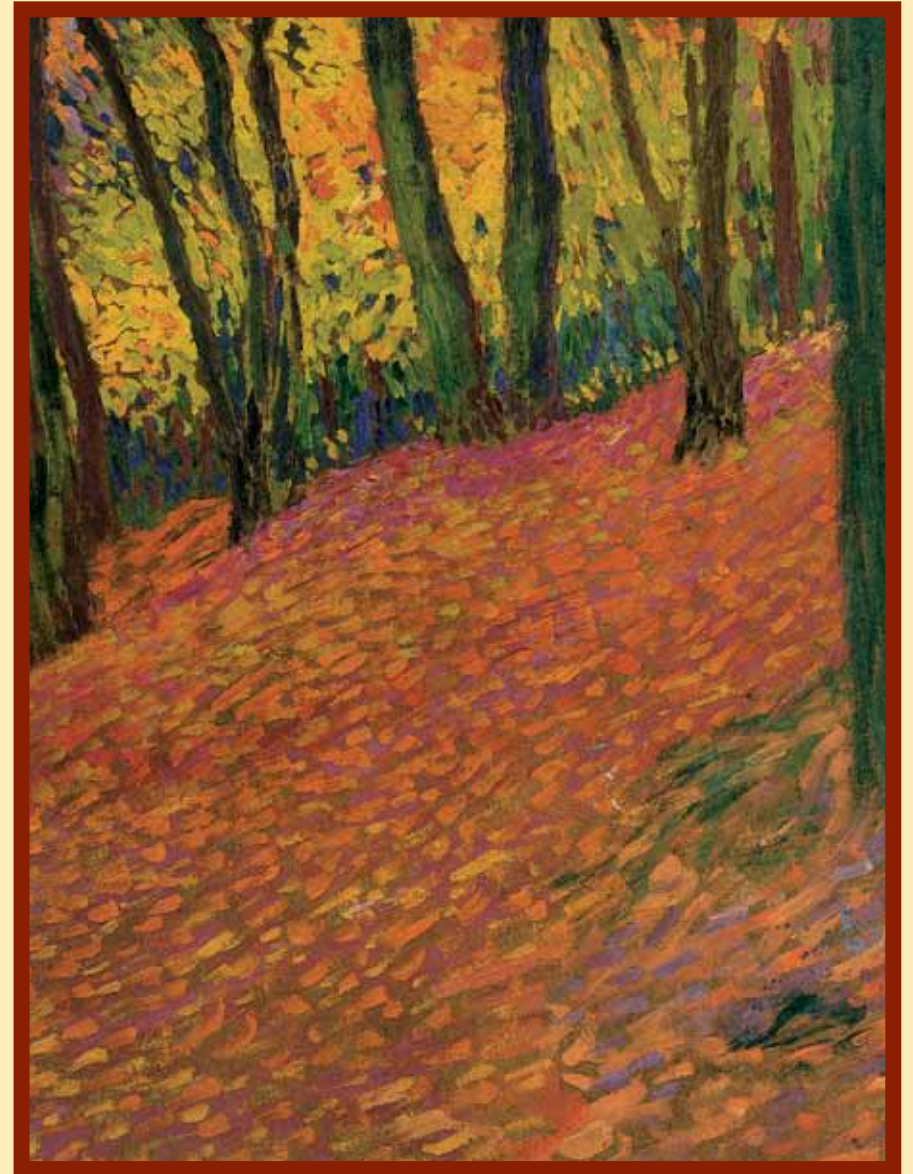
The Road to Paradise

collected poems

Robert Emmons

with a foreword by

N. Scott Momaday



The Road to Paradise

The Road to Paradise

collected poems

Robert Emmons

Foreword by N. Scott Momaday



CAPRA PRESS · SANTA BARBARA, CA · 2003

Copyright 2003 by Robert Emmons
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

A Robert Bason Book
Published by Capra Press
815 De La Vina Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
www.caprapress.com

Book design: Studio E Books, Santa Barbara, CA
www.studio-e-books.com
Set in Optima

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Emmons, Robert, 1934-

The road to paradise : collected poems / by Robert Emmons.—
1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-59266-002-9 (hardcover) — ISBN 1-59266-003-7 (hardcover numbered) —
ISBN 1-59266-004-5 (hardcover lettered)

I. Title.

PS3555.M5229 A6 2002

811'.54—dc21

2002012985

Cover artwork:

Sous-Bois à Saint Cloud

André Mare, 1885–1932

Mare first exhibited his work at the 1910 Salon des Independents. By 1912 he had begun a career in design and exhibited at that year's Salon d'Automne. After World War I, Mare's interest in functional, sober designs led to a successful collaboration in the firm that designed some of the post-war victory decorations. He continued to paint while also working on theater designs, and his vivid canvases turned such scenes as this glimpse of the woods near the royal chateau of Saint-Cloud into a conflagration of intense color.

Photographer: Scott McClaine

Contents

Foreword · 9

Preface · 11

Living . . .

The Road to Paradise · 15

Celebration · 17

Other Places Other Times · 18

The Tempest · 19

Winter Afternoon at Malibu · 20

Passage to New England · 21

Widows Weep · 22

Eze · 24

Market Day · 25

Soft Sad Smiles · 26

Shuttered Tight · 27

Inch by Inch · 28

Another Bird · 29

Lady Smack · 30

hard woman · 31

The Rain · 32

Night Sounds · 33

Refuge on Green Street · 35

November's Sentries · 36

The Photographer · 37

Ode to a Sailor Who Should Have
Died Young While at Sea · 38

The Perfect Couple · 39

For the Last Time · 40

the old house · 41

Cottage of the Plague · 42

Windows · 43

Loneliness · 45

The Journey · 46

City Bridge · 47

Running to Mazatlan · 48

Together · 49

Sweet Wine · 50

Carmel · 51

Winter Fog · 52

Early Morning Maine · 53

Avant-garde · 54

a charmed life · 55

Three Months To Savor · 57

Weekend in Big Sur · 58

Loving . . .

Reach For Spring · 61

The Seasons of Love · 62

Cloudy Days · 63

Home from Moscow at Napoleon's Side · 65

Girolata · 66

Play Games with Me · 67

Healing Hands · 68

Rational Man · 69

Shadows · 70

Monte Carlo · 71

A Summer Place · 72

The Other Side of the Island · 73

Have You Ever Had a Lover? · 75
Rainwind · 76
Love Letter · 77
A Morning Face · 78
Mondays · 79
If There Were No Tomorrow · 80
Summer Storm · 81
And So She Sits and Waits · 82
Sydney · 83
take me to the country · 85
Sweet Smiles of Love · 86
love has its limits · 87

Learning . . .

Mountain Tops · 91
The Old Man · 92
Perspective—Bangkok · 93
Wisdom · 95
on the metalworker's slab · 96
Old Warriors · 97
Sunday Afternoon · 98
Grandfather's Dying · 99
A Smaller Planet · 101
On Self-denial · 102
Lamentations · 103
Questions · 105
Field of Vision · 106
America the Beautiful · 107
The Money Tree · 108
Ferry to Hades · 109
The File · 110

his tragedy · 111
Mariners · 112
We Can't Ask More · 113
Hymn 272 · 114
Another Birthday · 115
The Contract · 116
Brave Voyager · 117
Child's Play · 118
The Stuff of Dreams · 119
A Touch of Darkness · 120
Light Up the Sky · 121
The Gardens of the Louvre · 123
The Greatest Gift · 124

List of Illustrations

Le Port de Collioure, Charles Camoin · 16
Rue des Abbesses, Maximilien Luce · 24
Interior of John Hubbard Rich's Home,
John Hubbard Rich · 34
Le Chemineau, Jean-François Raffaëlli · 44
Paris, Joseph Kleitsch · 56
Eragny, les Meules en 1897,
Maximilien Luce · 64
Nu, Pierre Bonnard · 74
Paysage avec Arc-en-Ciel, Jean-Charles Cazin · 84
Amalfi—La Pergola des Moines,
Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot · 94
La Lecture, Louis Valtat · 104
*L'enfant jouant au bord d'un bassin du jardin du
Luxembourg*, Henri Martin · 122

Foreword

Robert Emmons is closely revealed in his poems. He is a man alive to the wonders of the world, wonders great and small. He sees beyond the superficial aspects of experience to the realities at the center of our lives. He is thought, perception, and imagination personified. He is one who understands the possibilities of language. In his best work he realizes those possibilities precisely, without overreaching or falling short. This is to say, he is a poet.

The poems are various, and they extend in many directions. There are many landmarks along the road to paradise. The poet points to them and invites us to see them for what they are, or for what he sees them to be. It is a casual, gratuitous invitation. "Look," he says, "this is what I see, this is what I feel, and these are the words I choose to express my spirit." We come to trust his vision, his sense of the world. The invitation is to wonder, to delight, to solace, to discovery, to the sacred within us. We accept, and we are enriched in acceptance.

The language here is simple and direct, the style is plain. We are at ease in the presence of these things. They are to be taken as they were written, one at a time, thoughtfully, in quiet celebration.

—N. Scott Momaday, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The House Made of Dawn*

Living . . .

THE ROAD TO PARADISE

Is this the road to paradise?
It passes through the
redwood forest. (John Muir
told me that years ago.)
It turns at the sea marsh
and meanders by the bay
but then it doubles back
to climb to the summit
of the rock mountain.

Confusing, but the
pilgrims must know the way,
they march in an endless
procession with great
resolve and fervor.

It wearies me just to
watch. (I never was
one for exercise.) Besides
I really like it here, so
I'll wait and find out later.

You know it wouldn't
surprise me much to
learn the end of their long
journey is right here on
my front porch.



Le Port de Collioure

Charles Camoin, 1879–1965

During his student years in Paris, Camoin made friends with a number of fellow students who influenced his painting far more than any teacher. Several of these—Rouault, Matisse, and Marquet—joined in a loose association whose 1905 exhibition earned them the title *Les Fauves*: wild beasts whose brash use of pure color marked the beginning of the modernist movements and artistic experimentation. Camoin found his ideal subjects in the vicinity of St. Tropez, which for a time was the center of unfolding artistic development.

Photographer: Scott McClaine

CELEBRATION

Let's celebrate life
and find our freedom
with the exultation
of knowing ourselves
through each other.

Help me touch the sun
and I'll share with you
fresh meadows at Yosemite,
tall redwoods and wild blackberries,
cold mountain streams in Oregon.

Help me swallow the ocean
and I'll share with you
quiet anchorages at Santa Cruz,
raindrops on port windows,
billowing warm spinnaker rainbows.

Help me catch the eagle
and I'll share with you
lazy summer afternoons in Kent,
antiques and polished silver,
tea and soft string quartets.

Come celebrate life
and cover yourself
with today's joy,
like brothers Sartre and Camus,
we'll plan for no tomorrow.

WINTER AFTERNOON AT MALIBU

The sun raced westward
 moving quickly across the sky
striving
 unceasingly
 to shorten the day,

closing the curtain
 on an empty house

performers and spectators
 sent on their way

We shivered under our blanket
 and drew close

A small speck of solitary color
 dwarfed by miles of alabaster sand,

huddled together,
 looking out to sea,
 silently,
stragglers,
 remnants of an army
 that passed over the land

The chilled wetness
 increased
 in its intensity,

as the beach disappeared
 into the sea

and the sun fell off the earth.

Still we hung on
 watching and listening
 to nature's symphony

Finally, it was over;
 darkness had won.

All that remained
 were the night sounds
 and the gray

Quietly, we climbed
 toward the highway lights,

our thoughts intertwined
 closing a winter's day.

PASSAGE TO NEW ENGLAND

The sea meadow with its
lush yellows and greens
traces its fingers
along the sunlit shore.

The tide, running away
from the land, lays bare
the forgotten carcasses of
the forest, their albino limbs
twisted to cover their nakedness.

The remnants of the last
hurricane, now many years past,
still dig their broken prows
into the muddy banks, clutching
at the promised safety of the shore.

The seabirds search the placid
waters, soaring, floating, diving
in an endless symphony of
motion and sound.

Nature's beauty still holds fast,
now embellished by the scars
of time, the blemishes providing
a contrast for the reaffirming
touch of a late spring.



Rue des Abbesses

Maximilien Luce, 1858–1941

This early work already reflects Luce's fascination with painting in separate strokes of pure color, the divisionist technique developed by Seurat. The so-called "Neo-Impressionists," who took up Seurat's methods and commitment to the idea that a painting is carefully planned and composed, favored urban scenes and the everyday life of working people. These also suited Luce's political beliefs. He contributed to anarchist causes, and at one point was arrested with other demonstrators and spent time in a French prison.

Photographer: Scott McClaine

MARKET DAY

He had died two years ago and she had mourned more than friends expected. Thirty-five years together could not be forgotten in the space of months or even years. Perhaps Jules was too often silent, but he was still there, a presence.

Now, the loneliness was in every room. Somehow the apartment's stale smell of long neglect bothered her much more than in the past. She would open the window and sit quietly, watching the street below; she had become a voyeur, taking modest pleasure from other peoples' lives.

Market day had become her *raison d'être*. The excitement in the square, the gossip with Françoise and Regine, a careful purchase or two, oysters for lunch at the café, and then the short walk home. Afterward the waiting alone was somehow more bearable.

The Christmas invitation from her son would include a short visit, carefully planned, but then too soon the return home to the deafening solitude. Market day was her door to the world around her. For six days she would sit and stare at Jules' empty chair. On the seventh day she would go to market.