

*H. Pearson Gundy*

**Flourishes and Cadences: Letters of  
Bliss Carman and Louise Imogen Guiney**

The decade of the 1890s was by far the most formative and fruitful period in the literary career of Bliss Carman. Much of the time, especially in the early part of the period, he spent in New York doing editorial work which sharpened his critical sensibility and made friends for him among the rising young authors of the United States and Canada. Of these, one to whom he was greatly attracted as a poet and as a person was the New England author, Louise Imogen Guiney.

Always at his best in his friendships with members of the opposite sex, Carman in the early nineties was ready for a new romance. His fiancée of ten years standing, Julia Plant, finally tired of waiting for him and in 1891 married a Boston businessman. And who could blame her? Carman and she had become engaged shortly before he left Fredericton to do postgraduate work at Edinburgh. But his year overseas was largely a waste of time, and he returned home without a degree and with no prospects of steady employment. For the next three years he tried one thing after another – teaching, surveying, articling in a lawyer's office – but the only thing he really wanted to do was to work at poetry, an occupation which would not support himself, let alone a wife. While he was in this uncertain state, both his parents died within a year of each other, and the small patrimony he received enabled him to go to Harvard in the hope of becoming an English Professor.

The two years 1886 to 1888 that he spent at Harvard were a turning point in his life – not so much for the courses he took but for the friendships he formed and the intellectual stimulus they offered. He found his English professors, Hill and Childe, disappointingly pedantic, but was enthusiastic about a newcomer to the Philosophy Department,

Josiah Royce, who was overshadowed at the time, however, by William James in the department, and by Charles Eliot Norton, professor of art and distinguished man of letters, in the wider university community. Although not one of Norton's students, Bliss Carman was befriended by him and encouraged in his poetic ambitions.

George Santayana, whom he later came to know, graduated from Harvard just before Carman went there. Among fellow students, however, there were several outstanding men who would leave their mark on American intellectual and artistic life. Undoubtedly the most brilliant member of the class of 1887 was Bernard Berenson, fine-art student and editor of the *Harvard Monthly*, to which Carman contributed a number of poems. Berenson sought out talent and was the recognized leader of an energetic group which included, in addition to Bliss Carman, Ralph Adams Cram, architect and authority on European Gothic; his later partner, versatile Bertram Goodhue, architect, book-designer, and typophile; Tom Meteyard, impressionistic painter and pupil of Claude Monet; his close friend and Carman's, Richard Hovey, a graduate of Dartmouth, friend and admirer of the French Symbolists; George Pierce Baker who became professor of drama at Yale, and William Ordway Partridge, the American sculptor. There were others in the Berenson circle as well, among them some intellectual women friends of Bernard and his younger sister, Senda, who joined the faculty of Smith College: Gertrude Burton, wife of a M.I.T. professor and later on a close friend of Bernard's wife Mary (a sister of Logan Pearsall Smith); Maude Mosher, a music student who went to Paris to become a solo violinist but forsook the concert platform to become the wife of J.M. Robertson, the Elizabethan scholar; Alice Brown, essayist and short-story writer; and above them all in mental stature and accomplishment, scholarly and vivacious Louise Imogen Guiney. A talented and articulate group they were, almost all of them authors-in-the-making, but Guiney, as she was familiarly called, took the lead by publishing two books while still in her twenties — *Songs at the Start* in 1884, and *Goose Quill Papers*, a volume of familiar essays in 1885, the first of several such volumes to follow.

Carman's exact contemporary, born as he was in 1861, Guiney had had a very different upbringing from that of her fellow poet. Coming from a Roman Catholic family she remained through life a faithful

daughter of the Church. Her father, a lawyer, served in the Northern forces during the Civil War, rising from private to brigadier general. Severely wounded in the Wilderness campaign, he survived the war, but in broken health until his death in 1877. His dearest love was his talented younger daughter, Louise, whom he imbued with his own delight in exploits of chivalry, especially those of the Royalists in the English Civil War. To Louise, her father himself embodied the noble, chivalrous spirit of the Cavaliers, and to her, General Guiney bequeathed his ardent interest in the seventeenth century which she made peculiarly her own, first at her convent school in Boston but chiefly by means of personal research at the Boston Public Library.

Unable, however, to support her mother and herself through her writing, she became postmistress of Auburndale, a suburb of Boston, and, later on, a cataloguer in the Boston Public Library.

In 1889, Guiney visited England for the first time and while there became a friend of the Meynells, the Hinksons, Arthur Symons, W.B. Yeats and his circle. An Anglophile before she left the United States, she fell in love with the English way of life, moved there permanently in 1901, and made her home near Oxford until her death in 1920, leaving unfinished what promised to be a definitive work on Henry Vaughan, the Silurist, and an anthology of Catholic poems from Sir Thomas More to Alexander Pope.

After Carman's death in 1929, all Guiney's letters to him — or, rather, all that he had kept — went to Lorne Pierce, his literary executor. And from Miss Guiney's niece, Dr. Pierce obtained Carman's letters as well. Thus we have in the Edith and Lorne Pierce Collection at Queen's, with some regrettable gaps, both sides of this sprightly correspondence.

I propose, then, for the most part to let the two poets speak for themselves through their letters, supplying a few connecting links and explanatory comments. The extent of the correspondence makes it necessary to be selective, but I hope to quote enough to indicate the full flavour of the letters and the mirror-like image they give us of their writers.

Lou Guiney began the correspondence in 1887, but unfortunately her first message to Carman has not survived. From his reply, however, we know something of what she said. She had taken an excursion by sailing-vessel from Boston to Halifax, stopping en route at St. John.

Knowing that Bliss was then in New Brunswick, she sent him greetings, with news of the Berenson circle and their plans for establishing a new literary journal to be called the *Twentieth Century*. Guiney had been asked to be the literary critic, but turned it down as too demanding. She went on to say that she had been reading the nature stories of the American novelist Theodore Winthrop, a casualty of the Civil War.

Carman's reply, dated 1 September 1887, was written from Clifton, some twenty miles up-river from St. John, where he was visiting a Miss Wetmore, an elderly relative who lived in his grandfather's old home. It is a characteristic letter, just a shade more self-conscious than his later letters when he knew her better.

Dear Miss Guiney, [he writes] You may leave the "Twentieth Century" in the outer darkness where its place is. Why should we strive with the thing unborn? But the unpardonable sin is to have touched at St. John and not sent a lyric shout across twenty miles of hills to [this] corner of summer... All ships aside, — you have not made the province a sucked orange unless you have seen the Saint John. Three times a week a country steamboat leaves...the dark, rich city you beheld, and makes inland among the rolling fir hills. In a couple of hours she reaches a cluster of houses where once was life — and that is Clifton. At one end of the same an old homestead! A home when its founders lived, now merely a stead. Here the ghost of a garden fronts the river — and a large square corner-room looking south over the mile-wide blue, hold all that is of the days that were. ... It is a room that has escaped Time himself — in it you may spend a month, and behold! it was only yesterday you arrived, and tomorrow you must go into the world again. Just as [I write] this a fair maid of sixty, the sole other occupant of the house, whose portrait at sixteen beams from the wall, makes through the doorway under full sail and presents the poor Eremita with a glass of homemade wine. So here's a health to the well-favored one of "the father of us all". May her new volume increase her name's glory! ...

So you have foregone the "Twentieth Century"? Happy you! Why should you spend years in thankless work of criticism when you have better tasks in hand? You are wise, I think, but alas for the magazine! ... I hereby croak its non-appearance. ...

Your "dear jerky Winthrop" is certainly blessed in that he is an open-air man. Don't you think, though, that he and Thoreau write when they are too near their object? Their eyes are too sharp, they strip the mountains of their haze. They will not let anything have its charm of distance, they must forever be diving into a lake before they speak of it. They have no charm of atmosphere in their pages — at least W. has not for me. He loves Nature, but he can hardly open his mouth without hideous blasphemy against the divine gift of speech. O he does speak in such barbarian tones. He may have been one of the blessed dumb — a poet without gift of speech.

Yours sincerely  
Bliss Carman

Well, there you have, right at the start, I suggest, some of the elements of the born letter writer — a ‘divine gift of speech’ transferred to notepaper. This letter has the immediacy and spontaneity of good conversation. Carman ‘places’ himself as he writes, so that Guiney can visualize as well as ‘hear’ him as he answers her message. He takes her up seriously enough, but in a slightly bantering, light-hearted way, with the deft touch and the happy phrase — a delightful letter to receive. And we shall see these qualities even better exemplified in subsequent letters of both Carman and Guiney.

The next letter in the series, and the first we have from Guiney, is dated from Auburndale, 15 February 1889. Carman has sent her his latest photograph, and to return the favour she sends him hers. She has news of Cram, Berenson, and Partridge, and she tells of her hope of finally getting to London. But I let her speak for herself:

Auburndale, Mass.  
15 Feb. 1889.

‘Twas better than a valentine, dear Brother Carman. It pleases me immensely to give you this rap in return, being myself fresh from the camera and set forth with true Bostonese severity. ...

I don’t want to tell you what I have been up to; it’s too disgraceful for aught but an idle vagabond ear like my own. ... However if I don’t arise and shine, you other Twentieth Centurions do. Here’s Cram making me proud as Lucifer with his fine, bold architectural vision of a new State House. ... Now and again I hear from B[ernard] B[erenson] who is still drinking Europe in ... and scorning mankind. Our friend Partridge works on in Rome and has a sunshiny time with the lady I hear called his “wifely wife”. Mention of our founder and founderer B.B. leads me to remark that some of Henry George’s land-reform apostles have filched our unique and precious title and set up a journal to be known as *The Twentieth Century*. Won’t it make B.B. howl! ...

I have an illusory will-o’-the-wisp notion of getting to London next summer. If I do, won’t I “loafe and invite my soul”! But I can do that hic et ubique. Meanwhile I am the dullest, the stay-at-homest, the out-of-pocketest poeticuli that ever did breathe, and sufficiently proud of that distinction. ... Goodbye and fair befall you! ... Commend me, too, to that beautiful river of yours; the Charles, here at my elbow, owns he’s no peer for him.

Yours friend, as heretofore,  
Louise Imogen Guiney

On May 7th Carman wrote again, this time asking a favour of Guiney. He had learned of an editorial vacancy on the staff of *Scribner’s Magazine*, and if she knew E.L. Burlingame, the editor, he hoped she would put in a good word for him. He continues:

Do you know Cram's address? Will you send it to me? He is one of those whom I have shamefully treated and whom now I would lamely entreat. Berenson (B. and only) is another. He still goes his butterfly way through Europe. Florence is the last flower in his gaudy path, so Mrs. Mosher writes me. A letter from her came today. They spend another year in Paris.

Who told me you are to sail on 1 June? All the winds go with you! and I — if I don't make New York — will have to summer it once again on the old Saint John, being as poor as all true poets always are.

Your photograph, bless you! is fine to have and I thank you sincerely. Only I mildly venture to think the others taken before (in Cambridge was it not?) better than these.

By the way, and in sober truth, what *do* you do when you want a little useful help or criticism? How is one to learn anything about one's art? There is that splendid article by Mr. Norton in *The Forum* for March; nothing could be better. But for special criticism in verse can you name *one* name? I would give a great deal for a little sound advice. Will you not be good, and write before you leave?

Ever your friend,  
Bliss Carman

Guiney replied by return post:

Dear Man of the North:

I write at top-speed sitting on my knapsack, for if I don't seize this moment by the ear, nary an answer can you, or I, get out of my pen. Your letter was a relish. I'm going through it categorically, because I haven't time for flourishes and cadences (away with such anyhow) as I start for New York in a few hours. Mr. Burlingame ...though he is fearfully and wonderfully friendly to me, I don't know him at all! nor shall I ever have laid eyes upon him until this coming week. Natheless ...I will most surely bear your desire in mind...

Cram is in a glorious Common-overlooking office at 2 Park Street, Boston, where I believe fame will yet drop upon him ... . If you write to Mrs. Mosher soon, tell her I love her, and also that we will call upon her in the rue Washington, where I trust the Genius of my Country will materialize and point out to me her number.

We sail June 1st, and stay two years or so, chiefly in England, where I must peg like a fiend and float the family pocket. All thro' July think of me as footing it through Cornwall and Wales. My one woe is that I can't find a fellow canoeist to do some of those delicious French rivers. I wish you were about. ...

Critics there be none, so do I believe too. We'll have to wait until Berenson grows up! ... As for me, my dear boy, I never had the luck of a true censor in my life. ... But the "critics" of verse are given us of the gods for our laughter and scorn. My own philosophy is to forswear all outer hope, and labour savagely in the dark. ... (10 May 1889)

Carman replied at once to bid her bon voyage, to thank her for Cram's address, "but most of all", he writes, "thanks for one supreme

sentence: 'The "critics" of verse were given us of the gods for our laughter and scorn.' That is delightful! I shall use that one of these days with full credit of its origin... Give you much joy of London and lovely England ... Think of me this summer when you see breaking water in a stream. I shall be canoeing it here, I expect. Joy go with you and a fair sky." (17 May 1889)

Later that summer, while he was visiting his cousin, Charles Roberts, in Windsor, Nova Scotia, Carman had some of his newer verse set up in a printed broadside for private circulation. He sent one, of course, to Guiney, and she wrote a delightful reply from London:

12 Dec. 1889

'Carman nobis, divina poeta'!

This is a niggardly business after your largesses. Here's thanks at any rate and a Merry Christmas to you! The verses were fine, especially to my liking the "Vinland" and the second part of "Marjorie". Their beauty is in a sort of mysterious mist, like George Fuller's pictures. If you will let me say so, I am prodigious proud of you, Sonny!

... London is quite what I took her for; soot, blind alleys, antiquities, gentle voices; I love 'em all. Not a line of rhyme have I perpetrated since I left the fatherland, but as I am still in handsome poverty, I think I must still be a bit of a poet. What do you do up north there? Be not in skates or ice-boats while I peg at the British Museum. There be some ills too sharp for flesh to bear....

If I had any news, I should append it... In my personal chronology, the most thrilling event is the arrival of a barrel of American apples. 'Tis a still old country, where the soil gives, and holds your feet. If I could echo Stevenson without treason,

'Tomorrow for the States, for me  
England and yesterday.'

I do it. *Ubi antiquitas, ibi patria.*"

A month later, Guiney hears from a common friend that Carman is hoping to get over to London, and she immediately offers to find him digs:

I hear my brother-in-Apollo is coming over here presently! Now I am an old London hand, and flattering natives say I know the town as well as another scamp, Branwell Bronte. What I want to find out is whether B.C. doesn't want me...to hunt him up lodgings etc. which that same I would be delighted to do.... The best nests for poets ... are surely in the quiet old Inns which are now disused by the barristers, such as Clement's, Clifford's, Danes! and even Furnival's. They are all in the heart of the city a few feet off the highway, and still as Paradise. Or is there anything else in which I can serve my contemporary who sends about the loveliest thing he ever conjured up to the *Athenaeum*?

I am off for Dublin this week until Easter; but shall be back in London all the summer long, 'so as with' excursions. I am well as ever, and seated on the two horns of too much to do and not enough to pay for it. (18 Feb. 1890)

But Carman's plans for England were cancelled when, in February 1890 and at long last, he managed to land an editorial job in New York on the *Independent*. This was a religious, literary, and public affairs weekly, privately owned by the publisher, Henry C. Bowen, a prominent Congregational layman of Puritanical outlook. His employees had to sign a form letter stating that they were "so far in sympathy with the views of the *Independent* relating to temperance, smoking, card playing and matters of social reform generally" that they would actively support the paper in their work and in their personal habits. Bliss must have winced once or twice before appending his signature, but having done so, and backed by a letter of recommendation from Archbishop Medley of Fredericton, of the Anglican Church in Canada, he got the job of office editor at a salary of \$20 per week with two weeks' vacation. The senior editor was Dr. William Hayes Ward, a distinguished Biblical scholar who had joined the *Independent* in 1868, and although he had the final say, he gave Carman a pretty free hand in conducting the literary part of the paper.

An editorial statement at the beginning of 1891 indicates the kind of paper it aimed to be: "The *Independent* has been a great paper for more than forty years. It will be a greater paper in 1891 than ever before... Our contributions in prose and poetry, in story and discussion will be the best that can be found in two hemispheres... We will allow ourselves to be left behind by no periodical, weekly or monthly, in the country."

Carman proved to be an excellent editor, judicious in his selection of verse and literary articles, resourceful in attracting new writers, and in offering editorial criticism, always pleasant and helpful to visiting authors. He published some of the best work of the newer Canadian poets, Roberts, Lampman, D.C. Scott, W.W. Campbell, Pauline Johnson and others, and did equal, or more than equal, justice to American and English poets. His correspondence as editor for the two years he was with the *Independent* is full of interest and significance for the literary historian of the nineties.

Within a month of taking up his new duties, he wrote to Guiney, who had already submitted some verse to his predecessor:

As you know, I presume, I am here on the editorial branch of the *Independent*. ... I have at once pushed your stuff ahead. Shall print your "Graves of Some London Poets" soon. ... I want you to know that I give no



favours. I am perfectly fearless and say what I please. I admire your work *tremendous!* And now I want to know if you cannot send us a London letter pretty often. Don't want it called 'Our London Letter' — that is too chestnutty. Makes people tired. But give a new name to each article. ... What pay do you want? Well, the Independent pays \$7. a thousand words, but that is very small I know. Better just mark your Mss with the price you want for it. This is gratuitous advice and not ex cathedra... You see I am not supreme here, and am obliged to work "fakes" as best I can... This between ourselves and the bedpost. (18 Mar. 1890)

Guiney wrote back to say that she cheered herself hoarse over his appointment. As for a London letter,

seriously, dear boy, I would like nothing better than to send a screed per month... Can I be as wandering, as incoherent, as unconsecutive as I please — politics, religion and Marie Bashkirtsoff excluded? Can I demand (and rob) a respectable old concern like the *Indep.* of \$30.00 say per letter, Speak up, Samuel that rulest Israel. ...

And I hope sometime or other before I beat my way back to the eyrey at home that you'll get over here to your ain countrie, and give me the exquisite, ironic honor of showing you about. That is unless the Archbishop of Canterbury is up for that office; for there's no telling to what you're coming, O man of the Twentieth Century, indeed!

This was written on April 7th, but by August 16th she still hadn't sent any 'London Letter' to Bliss. She explains her predicament: "I sat down when I felt like it, and at divers times, and I got off three papers each one of which I meant to confide to your critical eye, and each one of which, also, growing longer and more formidable than I realized, I dispatched in turn to the *Atlantic*, *Murray's* and the *Fortnightly Review* ... [for] I saw you couldn't stand a ganulous seven columns or so. ..."

She had recently made a pilgrimage to Matthew Arnold's grave in Laleham, and remembering Carman's Arnold ode, "Death in April", "did a sentimental deed in your name", she told him, sending along a pressed fern from the graveside.

Thinking of 'Death in April' reminds me to set down what you may know, and what is old news now: that Mr. Theodore Watts was hugely taken with your Blake strophes, and a whole clubful of wits at Bedford Park were smitten likewise, and fell on me when I said you were a friend of mine. ... There is a fellow of real genius here, William B. Yeats, 'Willy Yeats' to wit, who is busy just now on a book which has to do with Blake's singular philosophy, and who is about the best young poet I ever fell across. He is Irish, belongs to a family of artists, and is author of *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems*: a long, handsome, detached creature, like some innocent wild faun out of the wood. I have tried to put him up to sending you verses

sometime, for he writes extraordinarily sweet oddities unlike anything else; and I know Dr. Ward, as well as yourself, likes to land a new fish. Said Yeats also is your admirer, which is not meant as a hint at all."

She also commends Dorothy Sigerson, and speaks of a visit from the American poet Clinton Scollard. "Then there is the great and only Berenson, who contemplates Botticelli in the National Gallery, and sometimes smiles how d'ye do's on common mortals. He is going home next month, and will return to England, the lucky day-dreamer! for two years more. I can't say I enjoy him so much since he lost his Hyperian head and wears a beard like any grocer's."

Carman was touched by Guiney's thought of him at Arnold's grave: "There be sentiments and sentiments", he wrote, "and this one comes across the sea in good honest man-fashion that is very tender. Nothing from England could be dearer, and a large measure of love goes out at the thought of my lyric wanderer from "leafy Auburndale" passing by the yard where the master sleeps. No, I had not heard that my Blake verses were well taken up. And it is 'couraging to know it. As for your new poets, Willie Yeats and Dora Sigerson convey me some of their work, can you not? But be sure it will not take the place of your own." (9 Sept. 1890)

I pass over two or three intervening letters to come to one by Guiney written December 8 after returning from a visit to France, to do some research for an article:

I have been six weeks in France and the shade of Corneille is enough to disarm any loose and easy poeticulo. Such a frosty, nipping clime as is that sunny France! and such a blustering, scatter-brained, discourteous entity as is that civil Frenchman! I breathe again to be back among the slow, kind bobbies, and the uncertificated cooks, and the dull all-but-unanimous politics, and the blinking and dozing critics. What I went for I got...But I proved, meanwhile, to have a prejudice or two, to be a bigot; and behold I hang my head.

By the end of February 1891, she and her mother had returned home.

Here I am blinking hard to meet the bright New England sun again, and with secret reversions like Dr. Johnson's to 'Fleet Street' ... When you come to Boston there is a Large Dog of British ancestry here waiting to see you, and there is your committed friend, Louise I. Guiney. (25 Feb. 1891)

"Is the new dog mild?" Carman asks by return mail, "for I am no bolder than of old, and somewhat more rickety and feeble." "Drop in

next time you pass"; she replied, "the dog is a mild sad thing like his missis and your friend." Guiney sent Carman some prose and verse, but when several weeks went by without any word from him, she sent a mock-scolding letter in country-yokel style full of Josh Billingsesque spelling, and ending "Yours under diffykultis, Luweez Immojen Giny. Auburndale, the twelfth of Aprul, and feelin verry hosstul to eddytor-men..." (12 Apr. 1891)

This really got to Carman and he capped her performance with a long letter of his own in the same idiotic dialect, making amends for his silence by, of all things, a proposal of marriage — but such a proposal as he well knew would prompt an amusing refusal:

New York, 14 April 1891

dear Miss:

i am in Recect of yure letter and potry which Kame this morning...as a welcome visitur from Auburndale where I have had so manny pleasant Rekollecshuns of you and yure dawgs that I had to runaway from to eskape being Eaton up a Live without any provokashum whatever except my mild fais which was a "dedgiveaway" as the Boys say...

Yure potry is damgood...and you yourself are the Deerest Hunk of Dalite that Gawd ever let go round on the Earth to Kumfort peepel up ... annywas you are a dasee and i may ad ... you are the Oroarer Boareailus of mi dadreems, i am a sun Flower in the back yard kranen mi nek round to the lite of your Dazzling Skoolmarmety i glasses you are the rows of Sharun and the lilee of the Valet you may spurn me butt i will not Retreet i will foller you like a shadder and if i may filosofise I will say that thee Reesun I offer yu mi Hand and Hart is bekause you are so dum skeerish of the Men ... Yus are like a streak of wind in the leeves, shy and Kool ... like Chaist Dianer with her Beau...but anyway wen you go walkin in Auburn Dale these dais in Spring just think of me a little i will be Thirtee to morrow and not haf as green as I look an if you feel skeered at thes sentimens just remember that there aint no sort of use in shying for I am your devoted slave till deth or the Doctor us do part. ... I feel ashamed to sine mi name to this its so bawld like, but its troo and i am yours forever. B.C.

And back came a letter in kind from Guiney saying that his "billy doo" made her smile "read as enny tomartow", but "i kannot axsept your hanned at present — an i no its a fyne cleen won with awl the mussels strong — becos i am not a cittysen of the steat of mattrymony and never medal with syinces I don't no about ... i suppose you ghest i hartly wisht yew a hapi birthda whenn i red yure letter and if yew feel as rediklous yung as i do in yure inners i have simpatti foar yew, so i hav, as i am the same age ... gud bi deer man and whateor yew sa to mee i sa yure annuther and may the god Pan luv yew ..." (16 Apr 1891)

Dear Nixie, [Carman wrote in reply] the last crazy letter from your hand was simply delicious ...a new rare sugar to rival the old brown maple. ... Be it known unto your secret heart ... that this April weather gives me the wildest kind of homesick starts and 'nerves'. I wilt and stretch and drowse and play the rebel with Fate, and the legs of me fairly twitching to be out and away on the open road and over the fence into a wood. I tell you I can smell the good old earth *now*, and hear far north the rotting snow in the sun and the first cheer of the goldenwing.

I would give my boots to have you steer me over a few miles of Auburndale in "the heavenly weather's call." I don't say that you ought to be thankful you are not an "Edditur." But I do say that it takes a good deal of toughness to hang one's frame over a desk months and months. Still, please the pip! I will see you in May when I hope to get away for a few days. Until then may all our dear lords of stream and hill have you in their keeping! And Spring make easy footing to your feet. I thank the dear Sisters that you are not one of those "Hers" but just your faun-bright sunny self, whom a fellow may love to his heart's content, if he is not too forward nor mawkish, and jog along with most light-hearted to the end of the trail. So now, the old gods have a care of you! (22 Apr. 1891)

The next few letters deal mainly with each other's verse. Carman sent Guiney "The Sailor's Wedding", a long ballad which she liked in general despite minor flaws that she pointed out. "It takes a fussy old parrot...to pick out these things," she wrote; "forgive the same and give Polly a cracker... You're the only fellow of this generation I know who never simpers over his lyre." (14 June 1891) Carman, in turn, liked Guiney's "Athassel Abbey" but scorned her use of a Browningsque rhyme - "crannies" rhyming with "began is". "But shades of Orpheus! what a sound - 'began is', 'began is', 'began is'. (O Guiney aren't you ashamed to do anything so wicked?)" (10 Aug. 1891) She accepted his stricture and sent him a new sonnet. But this, too, he tore apart. "The volley of Nov. 13th was rather unforeseen," she said, "but upon my pen I believe you're right. I have broken every bone in that sonnet's body, though I liked the thing well enough before. It is a great thing, my pal, to growl graceful, and on fit occasions, and you can't lose by that." (16 Nov.)

Guiney then got into hot water quite unintentionally. She sent a long poem to Carman for his personal file, and another copy to *Scribner's* for possible publication. *Scribner's* accepted it for their Christmas number, but meanwhile Carman, assuming that Guiney had intended it for the *Independent*, had it set up in print and sent her a proof copy. She wrote back in a panic:

Is it possible, is it POSSIBLE that I did not explain to you that I sent you (not the paper) my ballad, precisely as you had just sent me yours? ... I cannot believe I have been so criminally careless as this. ... The Lord knows I am a forgetful creature, but I know what honor is and a seeming lapse of it like this breaks my heart... . (21 Nov. 1891)

Carman mended matters, however, not by dropping the poem – the page had already been printed – but by an editorial note on another page in the same issue explaining what had happened. “As *Scribner’s* will be out first,” he told her, “you will not suffer there at all. ... Now, dear Sunshine, I take the whole blame...but don’t worry about it. Dr. Ward says you are entirely free from blame.” (23 Nov. 1891)

“Tell Dr. Ward,” she replied, “that I am as proud as a Pharisee of his exoneration, but that I can’t quite appropriate it. ... You are a kind merman, and don’t you forget that I don’t forget it.” (26 Nov. 1891)

She next sent him an autumn poem entitled “November”, but to her surprise, if not her chagrin, he returned it. “The fancy that the woods are a ship,” he declared, “is too slight a thing to fasten a lyric to.... If you set yourself to deal with large human emotions or experience, your imagination will have something to do and will not play you tricks.” (27 Nov. 1891)

“You are right about my autumn verses,” she admitted, “and greatly staggered I was to perceive it, for I had suspected them to be quite fine! ... A capital critic you are, B.C., and I desire to retain you in my service; that is as long as you don’t like everything I write.” (7 Dec. 1891)

Perhaps conscious that he had been hypercritical, Carman made up for it with unstinted praise of her next offering. “I am quite overcome by the unspeakable beauty of ‘Open Time’...and...full of sad envy to think no song so pathetic and perfect will follow me. Dear Soul, it is just here that you are at your level best. ... If I snuff out while you are still in the bloom of youth, though it be a youth of eighty years, I want you to cause that stanza, ‘He has done with roofs and men’ etc. to be fired off over my departure. Your devoted B.C.’ (12 Dec. 1891)

“Dear Boy,” she answered, “Your praise is myrrh and cassia, and how I do roll in it! perhaps the more that I relish blame too ...” (21 Dec 1891)

She went to New York for a few days to visit a friend and Carman spent a Sunday afternoon with her. “Come up while it is still daylight,” she had written, “and let us all three trot over to Grant’s Tomb, will

ye? That's better than houses which belong not to the likes of us." (8 Jan. 1892)

Before she returned to Boston, Carman received a holograph poem for the *Independent* from W.B. Yeats. When he couldn't decipher one line in the second stanza, he sent it around to Guiney with a note: "Here is something from your Billy, just blown in from the sea. His poetry seems better than his handwriting; which is worse than my own. I want you to turn your gilt-edged vision on the second stanza here and tell me what it may be. Will you?" (11 Jan 1892) And Guiney replied at once: "I send you a translation of Willy Yeats' warble. I don't wonder the second stanza posed you with its 'mirriod' years. Like Charles Warren Stoddard, Willy was born with the misspelling spoon in his mouth." She will get a friend to lend him a copy of "Willy's little book of verses" so he can tell her if they don't win his heart. "How I did enjoy your coming over to play with me! Vale, valde. I am off early in the morning. Yours always, L.I.G." Dated, "12th Jan. 1892, Sodom and Gomorrah."

The Yeats poem, entitled "The Sorrows of the World" was the original version of a lyric later revised and re-revised, which appeared (in the altered version and under the title "The Sorrows of Love") in *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*. This came out in September 1892, one month before the *Independent* finally found a spot for the original in the issue for 20 October.

Carman, when he got the Yeats volume *John Sherman and Dhoya*, was at first put off by the Indian mysticism. "Thanks to you," he tells Guiney, "I have the writings of W.B.Y. But why a native should write of 'furrin parts' I cannot see. Here is an Irishman doing the East Indian act & other outlandish things. Don't like it." (16 Jan 1892) And Guiney rushed to Yeats' defence:

I desire greatly to fight you about Willy Yeats. Why shouldn't he do the East Indian acts? He has lived in London most of his life and been rubbed up with all the theosophies and alchemies and astrologies and Brahminites that ever were. In short he knows all to be known about occult oriental doings, and believings, understanding even 'black magic', though he is no more affected by them in the way of credulity than the Hudson is. He is, honor-bright, too large-minded a creature to write affectedly of things which are out of his way. Whatever is in his verses, from the fairies in wild Sligo up to — eternity, is germane to said Willy's honest heart. He is the oddest being to look upon you ever saw; long, soft-footed, with yellow-black eyes, and a

purple-black mane of hair, and the most abstracted, winning voice and smile. I should say he was six years old. His father, the most unworldly of painters, asked me once if W. wasn't 'an innocent wild thing out of the wood, a nice civil satyr?' That hits him off to a hair. (22 Jan 1892)

Carman was convinced, and two years later when Guiney sent him an inscribed copy of Yeats for Christmas, he was immensely pleased: "so many thanks for the W.B.Y. whom I know and read (what's more!)" (25 Dec. 1896)

After Guiney's spirited defence of her Willy, the correspondence quickens in pace, with letters back and forth for the rest of the year 1892. Reading between the lines, it seems clear enough that although Guiney kept her head, she half lost her heart — or what was left over of it from poets dead and gone — to Carman. Unfortunately his letters to Guiney at this period are missing.

She had hoped to see him in March when he made a hurried visit to Boston, but in the end he couldn't get out to Auburndale, and she scolded him in a teasing way for his unfaithfulness. She got news of him, however, from Louise Chandler Moulton, the New York poet and patroness of poets, then on a visit to Boston. " 'How's the unreligious editor?' says I. 'Charming as ever,' says she. Now somehow that's not quite you: You're worse and better ... I'd give half a Gravenstein apple to know your opinion of the pretty black-eyed Fraulein you talked to in Gotham — and I'm not commonly as mischievous as that." To which Carman retorted: "Now is it because I'm a 'faithless old faun' you offer me apples, my beautiful and beloved? I tell you your bribe is not big enough. Send me a whole Gravenstein and guarantee that it grew in the Ardise Hills...and my inmost heart is yours!" (8 Mar. 1892)

A second proposed visit at Easter had to be cancelled because of work at the office. To Guiney he confided that he had become disenchanted with the *Independent*. "Yesterday was Good Friday...and here I slaved all day like any heathen, alas! in spite of my godly bringing-up. I suppose the Church, I mean the English bit of it, will disown her erring son! Strangely enough I find the fodder which the *Indep.* weighs out to its hungry not at all to my taste. I tell you three more years at this desk will make me a finished and complete pagan. I am not to be in Boston at Easter after all." (16 Apr. 1892)

And Guiney was all sympathy and understanding: "Well, I'm a sympathetic soul...and I know just how you feel, and what you mean

by the pious tactics of the *Indep.* I do thoroughly and naturally respect religiousness however Philistine. But there is much in dissent which reminds me forever of Charles II's immortal snub, 'Odd's fish! 'Tis not the religion for a gentleman!' (20 Apr. 1892)

At the end of June 1892, Carman resigned from the *Independent* and joined Charles Roberts in Windsor, Nova Scotia, spending part of his time in Wolfville with the Prat family. He wrote a sheaf of new poems and had some of them set up in a couple of broadsheets to send to his friends. Copies went, of course, to Guiney, and her cheerful response is, regrettably, the last of her letters that Carman kept.

Dear lad, what a summer's harvest this is – 'Marjorie Darrow', 'Overlord', 'The Robin Song', and 'Faithless Lover' and 'The Seven Winds Song'. Blessed are you to write such verse, and I grudge it always that they are not gathered and labelled and flung in the teeth of the world which reads Ella Wheeler. ... I have had but one verse in the *Indep.* since you went; and nothing, I think, elsewhere. ... And so farewell, and flourish forever prays

Auburndale, 23 Sept. [1892]

Your devoted yokefellow  
L.I.G.

The years 1893 and 1894 were troubled ones for Carman in many ways as he tried to live by his pen, aided by the generous hospitality of his friends in Nova Scotia, the Meteyards in Massachusetts, and the Hovey family in Washington, D.C. His first published volume of verse, *Low Tide on Grand Pre* (1893), was well received and ran to several editions. Still more successful was *Songs from Vagabondia*, with Richard Hovey as co-author (1894), the first of three *Vagabondia* volumes they published together. But Guiney's reaction to these published works is not a matter of record.

In his personal life, especially in his relations with women, Carman seems to have sought safety in numbers, and was especially attracted to several charming and vivacious younger women – the Prat sisters, Nancy and Minnie, or Malyn as he called her, Hovey's cousin, Agnes Cook, a student at Wellesley, and above all Jessie Kappeler, Washington protege of his and Guiney's friend, Gertrude Burton. A girl of rare beauty, half Carman's age, Jessie worked in a government office and studied dramatic art. Carman fell hopelessly in love with her, and she led him a merry dance until her mother intervened and made it very clear that marriage with Carman was out of the question. Jessie, however, whom he called "Seaborn", was the inspiration for the first



group of love poems in the series "Songs of the Sea Children", the tamer appearing in the *Independent*, the more daring in *Town Topics*, 1893 to 1895. Mild enough they seem today, but in their celebration of physical love, at least by implication, they seemed then to be daring indeed. Louise Guiney found them offensive. Knowing as she did that Carman's verse almost always had some relation to his private life, she probably felt a sense of personal betrayal. In her emotional turmoil, she denounced the poems and their author in a letter which, in turn, shocked Carman even more. So hurt was he by this unexpected attack, that in attempting a reply he had to resort to blank verse:

O Lou, Lou Guiney, the red sunset swam  
 With the hard ache you gave me doubting me.  
 My innocent Sea-children "Adam's slime"  
 "Besmirching man and woman" ... "adding to  
 The sorrow and the conflict of humanity."

Your patience; hear me as you always have! ...  
 The fall of man's repeated every day  
 When soul and body are divorced in love.  
 Keep them at one (since we are in the world)  
 The body no less reverence, than the soul ...  
 I wrote the poems you have found so vile.  
 Yes, and you drive me in behind the bars  
 Of verse, too timorous to talk in prose. ... (30 Nov. 1894)

And so he continues for some eighty lines, an apologia not an apology. A rift it was, perhaps never quite healed, although it did not end their friendship. After months of silence, Carman wrote to her from Washington, 9 March 1895, asking her to excuse "O wilding one, these ages of silence and the encrusted pen, so seeming ungracious, when as always the particular devotion to your blessed self was unabated." In the interval he had edited the first few numbers of *The Chap Book*, forerunner of twentieth-century "little magazines", and his letter to Guiney was partly prompted by an article of hers in the current issue. "Indeed, I saw your hand in the C[hap] B[ook] & knew it before I came upon the reference to the beloved South-Sea Islands & myself. And I said 'Thank Heaven, they have something decent at last.' For since I bade my bantling to go stand alone last July, I have not been too proud always of his capers.... I am that poor, you could debauch me with a crust. But I am ambushed against the return of the julep.

Then fill me with the old familiar juice  
Methinks I might recover.

Mighty quick!" (9 Mar. 1895)

And hard on top of this letter he sent another concerning Guiney's "Valediction for Robert Louis Stevenson" — a long, somewhat professorial kind of letter criticizing her metrical scheme and suggesting how he thought it could be improved. (10 Mar. 1895)

It was Guiney's turn now to feel hurt and disturbed, but instead of defending herself, she tried to accept Carman's advice, only to feel even more dissatisfied with her revised effort. She tells Carman, however, that she proposes to dedicate to him her next volume of essays called *Patrins*. Bliss was proud and delighted: "The *Patrins* to me! Lovely! Ye're a perfect laidy and I takes off me 'at to you. And what a beautiful title! That book will be the pride of my eye." (14 Mar 1895)

A month later he learned that Guiney was going over to England again.

Pennons and bugles! I *am* glad of the news. And may all the joys of the roving foot go with thee. ... How this does my heart good, to think o' ye vagabonding along the fringes of the Welsh country. I have a taste for the likes of that — if so be you wouldn't walk me too hard.... But the British Museum! Ah, I should leave you at the door with a kiss of my hand and a 'Farewell venturesome friend!' For, in your ear, I have never been able to read in a library...I always feel...as if I had waked up in my coffin under six good feet of heavy earth, and all the other readers around me are so many silent book-worms infesting the dark in'ards of the cosmos. No sir, libraries are fearsome places. Never spent a solid hour in one in my life. Can't.... I prow through the vast Library of Congress here quite often, to watch the builders and the stones going into place. But when they cart in the fossils, let me scamper, dear Comedy Muse. (9 Apr. 1895)

Guiney returned from London before the year was out, and Carman wrote to her on December 11, 1895, from the new home of his Harvard friend Tom Meteyard, the artist, at Scituate, on the Massachusetts sea-coast below Boston:

Hear the storm! I doubt if it is raving over your Auburndale as it does down here by the open sea. For you must know my brother Tom Meteyard (the same who paints the face of nature a beautiful blue, till you would never take her for the same old girl, but must rearrange all your adjectives) has set up his roof-tree here, and called it Tortoise Shell or Testudo.... It is nestled under an old ancient roadside sleeping ground, where the headstones are half covered up or settled down in the earth; and it looks over a narrow marsh at the boiling sea. Tonight the lashings of the storm are all torn loose, and the snow is piping all hands soft. Just such a night as this two weeks ago I came over from Nova Scotia, when the ship dove and thumped and staggered and wheezed and warped along in the shriek of the winter's jibes.

For Christmas, Carman sent Guiney his two latest publications, *Behind the Arras* (a volume dedicated to Gertrude Burton, then dying in a Swiss sanatorium) and his ode to Robert Louis Stevenson entitled *A Seamark*. Though her reply is missing, it was clearly full of warm praise, as Carman's letter of December 30 indicates:

Ah child, your words are fine! 'Tis ever for the approval of one's fellows and comrades who *know*, that one toils. Is it not so? And if you like the book, be sure my satisfaction is solid and broad and beef-fed; and the leisure of a thousand years is mine, sufficiently filled if it yield one line for you to admire! True!

Glad you like the little poem -- and the measure of it, as I thought it happy when I hit on it....

But, bless your boots! I want to start a commune. ... I dare you to set up your roof-tree in Scituate, and trust to Fortune for the doughnuts! I am half minded to build a bungalow there, though I never was more than fifty dollars away from THE WOLF in my life. Two or three hundred dollars to cover you from the elements and no rent thereafter!...Like it? If we could form a colony, we might compress the wisdom of the serpent and be harmless as gulls. Why not?

Love to you and a sight of your door, wishes

Your B.C.

In January Guiney paid her first visit to Scituate, the first of several, for she became a great favourite of the Meteyards and their friends.

On 16 April 1896, the day after his thirty-fifth birthday, Carman wrote to tell Guiney that he was finally going to London:

Dear Lou Guiney:

I sail on the Cephalonia from here on Saturday for a few weeks in London and Paris. This robs me of May in Scituate, yet I hope when I come back to find you there.

Want to give me your card to any of your cronies? And is there anything I can do for you?

My London address is c/o Elkin Mathews, Vigo St.

Love to you,  
Bliss

His European trip was a memorable one. Thanks to Guiney's introductions, he met her literary friends in London, including Yeats, and armed with Richard Hovey's introductions he called on some of the French Symbolists in Paris, and in company with Bertram Goodhue tramped through Normandy and met Claude Monet, Meteyard's mentor, in Giverny.

But on his return, instead of going to Scituate, he went to Wolfville to visit with his friends the Prats. From there, he wrote to Guiney on September 2nd.:

Been a'lovin you all this time and neglecting you as usual. Thats the thing love is! ...and I am dissolved in penitence....

O I had a gay time in your London. And blessed you for joining me to so many fine ones. Your two Hinksons were a pair after my own heart. I could not tell which I loved best. He is a fine fellow, lent me his pipe and gave me some good honest Irish drink, the like of which is found only in Canada on this side of the sea. Also at their house I met Lawrence & Bullen, to whom I took a great fancy, and who treated me *royal*. I thought them princes of publishers. Arthur Symons, whom I ran to earth in Fountain Court, Temple, took me to Yeats' new abode. Dark alley near midnight, silent door, loud knock, moments of silence, footsteps groping downstairs, rattle of key in lock, door opened — and there, lamp held high above his head, stands your dark Celtic velvety inspired mystic, eloquent refined W.B.Y. himself, the William Blake of this smaller generation... Missed Harold Frederic and Gosse, but was treated most handsome by the Athenaeum in the person of its ripe editor with a dinner and good cigars.

Ten days in Paris, and not an idiom unslaughtered when I was through with it. Alas for the neglect of one's bringing up. But I loved her better than you did & felt no more foreign than in London. Alas, I went to that epitome of the empire, thinking I was a citizen and subject, and behold my speech betrayed me and I passed everywhere for a "young American writer". I wept inwardly, but could not refuse the compliment.... O yes, and I forgot — my chief love Normandy! Was dragged into a walking tour by B[ertram] G[oodhue] and gave up my heart without a struggle to the country between Rouen & Dieppe.

...Yes, and I forgot the Meynells. They too took me in, & Mr. Meynell put me up at the Savile Club and was no end good and kind. Also I broke three heart strings over their child Dimplings.

O I had a bully time. And here now Muse comes to see me every day, but she is whimsical. Persists in interminable scraps, and nothing worth while.

Five more letters, none of them particularly memorable, complete the correspondence, three of them dated 1896 — two from Wolfville and one from Scituate on Christmas day, the letter in which he thanks her for sending him a copy of Yeats' poems. Only one brief note in 1897; the final letter is from Scituate, 27 August 1898, written in a rather depressed state of mind while recuperating from a bout of illness. He had turned from verse to writing a weekly column for the *Boston Transcript*, though he admitted "I cannot do prose unless I am trying to prove something, and then I always prove too much." (17 Sept 1896) "Poems is few and far between," he tells Guiney, "and Transcriptions are maudlin poor, so you are only to think of me as one of 'these

presents' until the fire is relit and the Muse returns. How are you anyway? Powers love you!"

Guiney left again for England in 1901, to return only once or twice on brief visits to the United States. She was to receive one more message from Carman — a round-robin message from her friends among the Meteyard circle at Scituate, including some sketches, music, and the following verse by Carman:

Eenie, meenie, monie, mi  
Mrs. Meteyard, Tom and I,  
(Jack and Harry Barber too)  
Send our Howdy's here to you.

Eenie, meenie, minie, mo,  
Writin' 'cause we love you so,  
Wishin' you could only be  
With us in Testudine.

Eenie, meenie, monie, ma,  
Since you can't be here, no way;  
This Round Robin says to you  
"Howdy, Lou!"

(18 Oct. 1901)

By this time, Carman had come under the spell and sway of Mrs. Mary Perry King whom he first met in 1896 and who remained, for better, for worse, his guiding star to the end of his life. But that is another story, a tale yet to be told.

Could Carman and Guiney have made a happy life together? It is, of course, idle to ask such a question; but I think the odds were against it. Much indeed they did have in common — a commitment to poetry and the literary life and great willingness to help and encourage each other with thoughtful criticism and generous praise. Both were possessed of the comic spirit, sharing a whimsical sense of humour; they were both addicted to the out-of-doors and they had many friends in common. They differed, of course, in their religious beliefs, Guiney a practising Roman Catholic, Carman a lapsed Anglican, but they had a common sensitivity to spiritual values. There were, however, certain rigidities in Guiney's outlook on life that were alien to Carman, perhaps because she had retained more of their common New England Puritanical background than he had. There is no doubt, however, that she had the finer, more discriminating mind, combined with a bookishness and a

passion for scholarship far removed from Carman's humanistic tastes, creating for her an intellectual world into which he could enter only as a stranger. Both were in the vanguard of American letters at the turn of the century; both are now largely unread and forgotten. Much of their verse, to be sure, and most of their prose, today seems undeniably dated; but their letters to each other — those that survive — illuminate their times and quicken into life again two rare and beguiling spirits.