

July Dawn [a poem], by Louise Bogan.

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JUL 23, 1957

JULY DAWN BY LOUISE BOGAN

It was a waning crescent Dark on the wrong side On which one does not wish Setting in the hour
before daylight For my sleepless eyes to look at.

O, as a symbol of dis-hope Over the July fields, Dissolving, waning, In spite of its sickle shape.

I saw it and thought it new In that short moment That makes all symbols lucky Before we read them
rightly.

Down to the dark it swam, Down to the dark it moved, Swift to that cluster of evenings When curved
toward the full it sharpens.

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JULY DAWN

The lyric gift—the talent for writing lyric poetry—has been recognized, since antiquity, as chancy and unreliable. The symbol of the Muse once represented the unknowable process by which emotion is translated into a pattern of words. The emotion must be strong enough not only to produce the initial creative impulse, but to prefigure, in part, the structure of the poem as a whole. Not everything is “given,” but enough of the design should come through to determine the poem's shape, direction and speed. The rest must be filled in by the conscious mind, which, ideally, knows all the artful devices of language.

The gift comes and goes. As W. H. Auden recently remarked, a poet can never be certain, after writing one poem, that he will ever be able to write another. Training and experience can never be completely counted on; the “breath,” the “inspiration” may be gone forever. All one can do is try to remain “open” and hope to remain sincere. Openness and sincerity will protect the poet from giving in to fits of temper; from small emotions with which poetry should not, and cannot deal; as well as from imitations of himself or others. The interval between poems, as poets have testified down the ages, is a lonely time. But then, if the poet is lucky and in a state of grace, a new emotion forms, and a new poem begins, and all is, for the moment, well. —Louise Bogan

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Louise Bogan was born in Livermore Falls, Maine, and educated in New England. She has lived most of her life in New York. Since 1923, she has published five books of poetry, including her *Collected Poems* 1923–1953. During 1945–46, Miss Bogan held the chair of poetry at the Library of Congress.

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