

A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY

VARIEGATION

VOLUME III / SUMMER 1948

A reading edition from the complete issue

11

ISSUE 11

V A R I E G A T I O N

A Free Verse Quarterly

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*Set from the scan of the magazine. The poems, their titles, the poets'
names and the figures at the feet of the leaves are the printer's; everything
in this color is this edition's.*

*Free verse is not a desertion of prosody; it is an
exploration, intentional or unintentional, of the
mysteries lying at the metrical core of speech.*

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STANDING IN DUSK

Muriel Spark

Standing in dusk,
high trees and parapets
assert their structure,
being silhouettes made poignant
by your absence.
In despair at the bright day ended,
bare branch and tower
rise on the skyline
like demented forms
that probe the dark,
impetuous, with arms ambitious
for light,
reaching upward
as I reach
in the long night of extremity
for you, my love,
needing your steadfast sun
wherewith my whirling earth
would make a dawn.

SWAN'S FEATHER

Snow Longley Housh

Not the eagle's feather for me but the swan's;
Not the reaches of sky but the depths of cool
 water,
Water that takes the sky to its heart in ripples
 of blue,
Calm water where swans can float softly
With the quiet blue underneath their wings,
Waters of stillness and peace.
Wings were not made for flying only.

THE WIND BLOWS OVER

Howard Sergeant

But lovers
hoard summer
in their veins
and, blinder than moles,
fable out their winters
behind the walls
of flesh,
the singing bone.
Conditioned by desire,
even their stars
are brighter.

Hands
are not leaves
to wither
a weather's turning,
their limbs
not boughs to fail,
and all who love
drive twig and tendril
towards one end.
The cold ambitious wind
blows over them.

CLAUSTROPHOBE

Lawrence P. Spingarn

This room is small, confining,
Crowded with my paraphernalia.
Ritual reduces me to the room's dimensions.
Filling the room with smoke,
I arrange books, time's other houses,
Endlessly upon the shelves.
Here I sleep, wake, dream,
And make motions of consent,
Gestures of withdrawal,
Anticipate the street's intrusion.

If I had larger air, clearer action,
Tonics of omnipotence,
Would I return straightway to this room,
Frightened by freedom, space, myself?
Those interminable miles
That have led me nowhere!

ROOTS

Lawrence P. Spingarn

Trees die with groans, thrashing about
In the wide bed of undergrowth,
But stumps merely grunt
And will not yield an inch
To murderous, unaided man.
It takes a crowbar
And a stout yoke of oxen to kill a stump.
Even then,
Roots, left to themselves,
Grovel deeper in earth,
Fight downward for water,
Renew themselves continually.
Worms and salamanders,
Wriggling from the quick spade's cut,
Could do no better.
Roots demonstrate necessity
Where trunks and branches easily perish.
Who is there can kill a root?

THE CLIMATE WITHIN

Lawrence P. Spingarn

I have spent years
Seeking the perfect climate.
I do not look for weather,
Nor sun, nor freedom from the cold,
Nor the absence of rain and fog.
March growls within me,
A sick beast left to die between seasons,
Exposed to harsh elements.
My search
Is for the mind's climate
Where the heart is nourished with beauty
And the eyes are not voyeurs;
It is not here, this zone for which I plan,
Nor yonder, in a greener continent
Among lush growth and epithets of cockatoos.
Let each probe his own heart
For peace, for the cool spring of reason,
For that perfect climate that never leaves him.

PAGODA IN WARTIME

Nina Willis Walter

So long as the pagoda stood,
We were safe.
All around the fields were bleeding,
But no splinter marred its green and gold.
Under the eaves
Tiny bells tinkled their message
Of peace soon to come,
And we were content
To plow our fields again
And close their gaping wounds.

But in the night
The pagoda toppled into a heap of stone,
Its fine tiles crushed and scattered.
Where, now, is hope?

SMALL ARCHITECTS

Joseph Joel Keith

Here
in the sand piles
the children build
patiently, patiently
under the sun
their small warm houses,
their hopeful towers.

These children,
the light and dark faced,
know only words like high and building,
never the words of darkness and bigotry.

They hear the ugly words,
as the bully crushes
their little world
with war's tread.

They hear the protest
hurled as a spear
by the small hurt man
who loves them.

And there is a new
black word
in their dictionary
of light.

FLAILING MOMENT

Joseph Joel Keith

In the long drouth of the woman's silence
the man waited,
alerted,
preparing himself
for the sudden, inevitable attack
of anger,
the saved fury,
the whirl of words
like the tearing gusts
and loosened leaves.
Then,
helpless before the final sound,
he sat, silent,
while the murmurs were heard,
lighter than raindrops falling from sprouts,
and he had no white clean word
that could dry the woman's tears.

ANOTHER COUNTRY

Hanson Kellogg

Look, I was never on that corner,
Where the drugstore lights the grey roughness
Of the pavement, where the jukebox sings
The old songs in the bad new way.
No one came out in perfume,
In bright new cotton dress.
There couldn't have been anyone laughing,
And the leaves of the elm
Never glowed under the neon.
I was at sea, or out on a desert, or tearing
The softness down from the foothills under
my boots.

I could not have been twenty in any time past,
Nor forty last week.
I never was there.

SUMMER WAS YESTERDAY

Hanson Kellogg

The days go on, as an inept shadow
Scores evanescently the verdigris of a tilted
sundial.

The centipede feet of the months,
The slug trail of the years
Move as silently, as slowly, as tenderly
As the weeks of the seasons suspended
Over a formal garden.

The last thing: the blown petal,
The browned and crisped and shattered
stalk,

For that, you are no longer here.
You do not move in the darker garden
Where the growing strains
Its soundless search for sun
From underground.

CAPRICE

Hanson Kellogg

A strolling player piano
Holds court beneath my casement
With stars for retinue.

The highlights on the glassed bookcases freeze
A little after midnight.

THE WREATH

Mary Moon

Summer weaves a wreath
around my heart
from all the fragrances
and gestures of flowering.
Woven from the sounds
of seeds stirring,
of wind upon ripe wheat,
and of the urgency of new leaves
greening the dark branches upward,
woven from soft
pale drifts of light
upon unfolding petals—
all of summer's warmth
within the fragrance
of this bright wreath.

How can I keep this loveliness?

How can I keep
this summer sweetness
to wreathe my autumn heart
forever?

‘SERAPHIM’

Neeta Marquis

(Isaiah VI)

Lips mold syllables,
but in the mind
no plumes of light unfurl
fiery and beautiful.

Mortal man conceived the word,
and the inner image glistened into speech
to chord with planets,
soaring and blazing
against deeps of dark.

Has the golden symbol lost its gleam?
Why does its uttered beauty
lapse lifeless on the tongue,
cleansing no lip with coals of joy,
kindling no luster in the opaque heart?

MAKER OF GARLANDS

Ursula Stuart Laird

(For Derek Stanford)

You who are beyond experience
on the high hill above the snows,
looking back to other white-hung heights
and down on dim obliterating clouds;

You who live in yesterday, and yet do fear
the repetition of its exultation,
yet still do fear the curling leaf
that cradles last year's sun;

I am afraid for you who bask
in the past's ecstasy; maker of garlands
from pale petals that knew no flower.