

A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY

VARIEGATION

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A reading edition from the complete issue

16

ISSUE 16

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.*

CONTENTS

<i>Eve Walks. Jean Burden</i>	3
<i>Indian Feathers. Muriel Spark</i>	4
<i>Assignments. Aveline Perkins</i>	5
<i>Gossamer Days and Daisies. Terence Heywood</i>	16
<i>To a Collectivist. Grover Jacoby</i>	17
<i>Poem Reviews</i>	18
<i>Contributors</i>	21

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EVE WALKS

Jean Burden

After dark
I think Eve walks
the gardens of the world
in penance for the ones
that for her sin
lie sleepless. .

Louder than her heartbeat
is the crickets' tale,
(I wonder, do they sing
or dance?)
but louder still
Eve hears the women's prayers
drift by her
on their way to God.

Eve, renounced,
Eve, lost,
weeps for us who wake at midnight,
and winds our rosary
around her wrist
like a jewelled snake.

INDIAN FEATHERS

Muriel Spark

(FOR ROBIN)

As though committed to the early season
he is suddenly seeing to arrows and the bringing out
of Indian feathers; the year's high gamut
begins for the red boy's magic under his tomahawk.

Who stalks this tenderfoot so silently through
the morning forests that he will not turn his head?
Fierce presences, enormous enemies
he would fell with his bare hands but for dear
life's sake would not bury
one hatchet against the coming of a distant danger,
nor lay one twig of a trap for a stranger suspected.

Against the covering of the green traces,
and the falling of feathers and the falling-in
to brown ranks of Autumn palefaces,
O Spring-hunted Brave, be brave.

ASSIGNMENTS

Aveline Perkins

"There were giants in the earth in those days."

—*Genesis*

To chronicle the wheeled events
And accelerating headlines,
The Desk
Transfers me to the land of His Immensity,
Industry, Lord of Occupations,
To report upon hammered doings,
To write supercharged copy.

For twenty score days
My ear is welded
To his fabricating lips,
My listening flesh coupled
To his brazen utterance.
His works magnetize and magnify me
Into the instrument of recording.

Industry is sprawled on all our land—
His extortionate limbs are pressed
On looted hills and valleys.
Incontinent, he seizes continents.
He has smashed silence
Beyond hope of repair.
In his roaring palaces
I have seen magnitude
Machined and assembled.

I have observed Industry
Inside and out.
I have been with him and within him.
When I have talked with him,
He has uttered these giant words:

“I am enchained
By my own molten tyranny.
I am bolted down,
Mortised in the mud,
Nailed and stretched.
My pierced hands reach out
East and West upon the world.
My head is gasping at the Northern pole.
My transfixed feet
Are pointed to the South.

“Yet in this agony is power.
I am refreshed by the punishing turbines
And the lash of thunderbolts.
The nails which fix me to the tree
Transmit royal blood into my bleeding hands.
I am another Odin,
Lord of the gallows tree
Which kills me
And lifts me from the dead.
Sacrificing myself,
To myself,
Infusing myself
With divine power.

“Through me roars a torrent and a torment.

I am thick-ribbed and stubborn as a foundry,
Potent as a bulldozer,
Indomitable as the mountains of the moon.”
After these blasting words,
Spoken from the mouth
Of fury and of furnaces,
I see in metal deed
That he is mastering slave
And enslaved master—
Victim and executioner.

Destruction is fed by him and feeds him.
He slaughters and resurrects
And himself is slaughtered . .
Only to be recharged
With powerhouse resurrection.

1

(First Assignment)

I have seen him in the desert
Murdering rocks.
I witness a mountain's execution.
First the firing squad
Of dynamiting men.
Then the Brontosaurus steam shovels
Gutting the mountainside,
Eating it alive—
Squirting the engorged hill
Into swallowing dump trucks.

Only Horsepower
Can execute a mountain.

Upon an engineered scaffold
Flowing with dusty blood
The mountain is drawn and quartered.
From the railhead
Diesel-electric tumbrils
Bear the disembowelled mountainside
To primary crushers,
Where the shredded hill
Is pounded into extinction
By no millenium tides,
But in minutes is powdered
By ball-mill erosions
And processes ,which devour
Its substance and its sum of stone.

The dead dust is hurled
Into the rotating hell of kilns,
Emerges as “clinker” . . .
Each ball of it is bullet-hard
And marble-shaped.
Cooled and reground,
It has the mountain’s strength.

From the plant pours out
The white soul of cement.
Soul enters constructive flesh.
Skyscraping cliffs
Tower into bridged and builded shapes—
High terraces for speed.

The mountain is reborn!

* * *

Dionysus, lord of fertility . .
Broken in pieces at Thebes,
His fragmented flesh
Thrown upon the fields
To increase their production
The lord destroys himself,
Or is destroyed,
Feeding the remorseless multitude,
And fed by •
His own sovereign flesh
Dying into new life.

2

I drive on striding rubber
Into a world of force and fabrication,
Where shining dinosaurs walk upright
On hindlegs of aluminum,
And ancient violence
Wears such savage new designs
Earth never yet beheld,
Since Time's own huge machinery
Ground into first.

The foundry's anger
Erupts in precise volcanoes.
I am led down a long tunnel.
Its brick sides quiver like leaves.
Guides take me toward a door
Where civilization ends and begins.

The door opens.

Flaming tumult
Strikes me in the face
With a blow of sound.
Furnaces cry out
With the lungs of reeking tempest,
Demanding
That the smelted broth be ladled
From the swarming cauldrons.
Geared to mineral pastures
They browse and bellow
Always for more.
No engine spoons suffice
To feed their multi-bellies.
No speedy servitude can slake
Their thirst for speed.

I see the furnaces
Feast upon brass ingots;
Green flames
Spout from iron cheeks;
Their mouths are dreadful
With twenty-one hundred degree breath.

Olden splendor
Attends the pour-off.
As the iron lip is tipped
And vehement liquid
Spouts into the ladle,
Forty centuries fall away
The Babylonian armorer
Pours-off his cauldron.
Time has never dared to meddle
With the sacred ceremonials of metal.

Suspended on a single dangerous wheel,
Accompanied by death,
The ladle walks the tightrope
Of a solo wire
To waiting moulds—
Pours into them
“Green-hot” libations.

On a crashing stage
You see the ballet of the moulders—
The dance of pour-off men,
The coordinated rhythm
Of coremakers and shakeout men.

In perfect timing!
Imperfection levies
Mutilating penalties.

Democracy is forced
In this dangerous hothouse.
Industry does not live
By metal bread alone.
He also consumes
The vagaries of color
And the inequities of creed.
The African, the Indian, the White,
Through the necessities of brass
Become the alloys of equality.

Their labor bears
Luxuriant fruit
Sheathed
By electro-chemical fecundity,

With skin of chromium;
Fruit which first grows rough
From the sanded core of moulds.
Screw-cutters chop the fruit
From the brass branches.
Under hydro-blasting ministrations
Issues highpowered ripening.

3

Time's seas as well as water's
Discharged a treasure
From prehistoric rubbish dumps—
Dust heaps,
By plants refined and processed.

After the ages, like enormous pumps,
Have sucked the ocean dry,
Graveyards of pinpoint mummies
Rise into rich relief.

The ignorant land
Has captured from the sea
Microscopic loot:
Diatoms ...
Sea plant fossils,
Minuscule acolytes
Which serve
Upon the altars of industrial filtration.

Obedient steel beasts—
“Slushers”-

Tear the treasure from the hills.

* * *

Is there a choice
Within the iron land—
Ruled by forged authority?

High voltage tones reply:
“Though I am the monarch
Of metals and of minerals .
Still my anger casts
Only your solid lengthened shadow.

“Your hungry oils
Anoint me king.
Through my rotating sceptres,
You organize the fibers
Of your beauty and your power.

“In carving out my heart,
You make me carve
From limitless black; marbles
Forms of magnificence and death.
Like Cambodia’s mystic kings,
Of Fire and Water,
I come violently to death,
And so find life

r For myself
And for my people.

“So you draw life and power
From my steaming blood.”

Machines of potency,
 With high speed fertility,
 Proliferate six tin cans
 Per hurtling second.

The blanks are espoused
 By the body maker which begins
 The split-second breeding.
 Whizzing wombs
 Pulsate with tin cylinders ..
 The solder-roll quickens . .
 The double-seamer delivers
 Complete bodies.

Production roars
 Like a crashing metal oc—an.

Glinting birds fly—
 Beautiful in their speed—
 Silver-dazzling my eyes
 With wings of tin.

As the beneficiaries of force
 We have willed ourselves
 Into our destiny.

Our heritage is muscular—
 The estate of the iron gymnast
 Whose sprocket tendons . . .
 Strenuous chained wheels . . .
 And cogged and belted muscles

Pole vault the earth,
And hurl
The mountainous discus.

Gears and chains
Channel the tides of power.
Gear-cutters,
With skill and energy,
Cut the gears,
Tooth by tooth,
From solid metal.

Power must be transmitted
Into action—
The aim of power.
Power,
Like the products of power,'
Must have distribution.

Gears cannot have soft teeth
For the biting work they do.
The flame-hardener
Makes tough steel tougher.

Futures of power
Cast blue-shadowed shapes before them
In the oracle of acetylene.

GOSSAMER DAYS AND DAISIES

Terence Heywood

Silken streamers, rolls tenuous, banderoles;
You carried them along. Stubble weft-waves, playing
 stringcradles for the sunshine.
Sudden mass-flights of young spiders—
Trapism. They climb to the highest object available
 and let go, streaming
From shred-lines over the shrapnel-shredded wheat
 and cloven clover
When barley's beard is bleached
Between the Harvest and the Hunter's Moon.

TO A COLLECTIVIST

Grover Jacoby

Trees blot out mazes of roof line,
Sharp eaves,
And obtrusive gables,
Where the green wave of leaf
Breaks over architecture;
You, too, awkward creature,
Would be lost
In some great flood,
In the human overflow.

POEM REVIEWS

EDITOR'S NOTE: Critics of all literary persuasions are invited to submit their opinions of recently published poems to this department. Any type of verse published in either books or magazines within the last two years is eligible for short reviews. However, no reviews of poems appearing in "Variegation" will be printed. In order to accommodate "Poem Reviews" certain changes initiated with this issue have been made in the quarterly's format.

"tw" by E. E. Cummings. *Partisan Review* (February 1949).

This is a vertical poem on the page. Mr. Cummings takes as basic text the following: two old once upon a (no more) time men sit (look) dream. From these twelve words he constructs a poem of seventeen lines, nine stanzas, of which no line is longer than seven letter-spaces and none • is shorter than one letter. The first eight stanzas consist alternately of one and three lines each, leaving one line for the last stanza. Delivered orally, with proper pauses at each line end and stanza division, the poem offers a series of liquid and murmurous syllabifications (there are only two sibilants in the entire poem) such as pigeons might utter to one another, as they putter about the front of a public building where old men sit in pairs.

Myron H. Broomell

"Movie Star in the Projection Room" by Eve Merriam. Poetry (Chicago), April 1949.

Miss Merriam sympathetically renders the central emotion implicit in a personal situation rare or only inchoate for most citizens—that of a movie star watching herself on the screen. "The angelic monster," the screen image is called—a gigantic and mechanical cynosure for "a million hands" which will dream of closer acquaintance—but into this creation the woman's soul has somehow poured itself, so that it is not she who beholds her moving photograph, but "her clothes" which "lean forward in the chair, begging" the screen to render up "the full immortal moon of Me." Students of the technical art of prosody would find the stanza structure, rhyme scheme, and variation of line-length in this poem worth their attention. The mechanical form would be classified as "traditional"; yet it is very probably unique.

Myron H. Broomell

"Sonnets of the Season" ("January" and "February") by Donald C. Babcock, *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1949.

Fresh proof of the music the trained ear can contrive with rigid forms appears in these Shakespearean sonnets, which move with flowing beauty. They likewise visualize detailed winter scenes with the accurate grace of a calligrapher's brush: "When I came home across the moonlit land . . . Frail ghosts of goldenrod on every hand / Stood delicate against the drifted snow. . . . The snowbound junipers like igloos arched / Their woody mazes, making tiny lairs/ For field mice." "February," however, exceeds "January" in emotional appeal. Enriched by seasonal astronomical references, and by the poignant anxiety of those "who shiver on the edge of our new scintillant ionisphere," it makes perceptible the turn of the year as "With cosmic sigh the winter falls apart."

Neeta Marquis

"Lake Song" by Anne Wilkinson. Here and Now (Toronto, Canada), No. 4.

Rising above the chorus current in many places, Anne Wilkinson, with "Lake Song," published in the handsome new Canadian journal, "Here and Now," proves to be a disciplined craftsman. "Turn a new leaf on your tongue, water, lick the deaf rocks," and then "Wash, wash over the feet of the summer-bowed trees," says the soloist in freely flowing cadences; and again the mature and finely pitched voice rises and falls and rises again with splendid lines like "Wash age from the face of the stone." Since the author is obviously a student of the Bible, the old cadences, used by the poet in a modern way, move melodiously in "I am a hearer of water" and in one of the loveliest lines in this poem, "My skin is the leaf of the willow." "Lake Song" deserves to be widely anthologized; it quenches the thirst of the wanderers in any wasteland of arid abstractions.

Joseph Joel Keith

"Small Town Girls," by Richard Hart. Contemporary Poetry, Winter 1949.

In fifty-six irregularly rhymed lines Mr. Hart has drawn a sharp but tender picture of small town girls who "have ample hours to fish their pools of inwardness." It opens with a strong first line—one that states dramatically and succinctly the poet's theme of woman's universal frustration: "Sisters of Molly Bloom and Josephine/ Each summer in the close sun of our shore/ Or in the bayside twilight's long serene/ I watch you bathing, coming from the store." The small seacoast town comes to life as vividly as do the young girls: "Down at the heel of

lid I streets/ That call dead queens and admirals by name/
They perch on fishing boats and dip their feet/ In waters
that across the way wash pnin." Mr. Hart makes good use
of easy speech rhythms, and his description of the
romantic imaginings of young girls is accurate and kind.
One could have wished for a more incisive ending, but
except for the last stanza which is definitely a let-down,
the poem has keenness of insight, and skill of execution. ●

Jean Burden

"The Darkness" by Weldon Kees. *Harper's Magazine*,
September 1949.

This poem conveys with subtlety the writer's mental
state or that of the person whose identity he assumes. He
sees darkness everywhere, and the climax comes when it
even "saturates the sun." The pessimism in these verses
overwhelms, but is never strident. Though the second and
third stanzas contain images recalling T. S. Eliot's early
period, the mood and aspect of the whole poem must be
conceded to be the author's own. The gradually
introduced rime has the effect of the intermittent drawing
of a curtain till it finally closes. This poem was honored by
an appearance in the Sunday "New York Herald
Tribune's" important column "A Week of Verse" on
September 11, 1949.

"City Snow" by Mary Hodgkinson. *Outposts* (Manchester,
England), Winter 1948.

In flexible blank verse Mary Hodgkinson makes very
real the moment when
"the wire will lose its solid sheath of ice,
the bush be stripped of glassy ornament."

One feels the whole "brittle world of snow" breaking
up and slipping away. It is rare in these days that a poem

is so objective in its approach. Although its form is not so interesting as that of most poems appearing in "Outposts," the poem is worthy of notice because of the directness and completeness, with which it embodies a definite sensation. The last two lines with unforced pathos effect a transposition from one kind of feeling to another, from that accompanying sensuous realization to the more human emotions involved in the awareness of life's evanescence.

CONTRIBUTORS

JEAN BURDEN lives in Altadena, California. Her poems have appeared in prominent publications such as "Tomorrow" and "The Saturday Review of Literature."

MURIEL SPARK, editor of "Forum Poems and Stories," lives in London. In 1948 she edited "The Poetry Review," one of the two or three most important English poetry journals.

TERENCE HEYWOOD'S poems have appeared in two of Oscar Williams' anthologies and many American and English magazines. He lives in the county of Sussex, England.

AVELINE PERKINS was born in Rio de Janeiro and educated in England. The "Assignments" appearing in this quarterly form the first part of a projected free verse epic in which he intends to convey the impact of his experience in gathering material for articles on industries in Southern California, where he is now residing.

MYRON H. BROOMELL is the author of "Time by Dialing" and the "City Built on Sand." He teaches at Fort Lewis College in Colorado.

JOSEPH JOEL KEITH'S latest book, "Durable Fire," is being published by The Decker Press. He has six other books to his credit, and his poems have been appearing in the "American Mercury," "Pacific Spectator," "Tomorrow," etc.

NEETA MARQUIS, a cousin of Don Marquis, completed two terms last year as president of the Poetry Society of Southern California. One of her poems recently was reprinted in the "New York Herald Tribune's" column "A Week of Verse."