

A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY

VARIEGATION

VOLUME V / WINTER 1950

A reading edition from the complete issue

17

ISSUE 17

V A R I E G A T I O N

A Free Verse Quarterly

Volume V · Winter 1950 · Number 1

*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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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VARIEGATION: A Free Verse Quarterly is published by
Variegation Publishing Co., Room 549, 124 West 4th Street,
Los Angeles 13, California. 25c a copy, \$1.00 a year.

GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

SOAP BUBBLE

Gertrude May Lutz

Here is the zero-round
held in the hands' two palms.

The image of the child you were
stares
through the cupped moment.

Within the bubble of rainbow,
behold
the curved, the leaning eyes
pressed against glass.

The image of the child you were
stares . . .
shatters . . .

Between spread startled fingers
fall
the small, hot shapes
of tears.

OLD ACTOR

Rosalie Moore

Your seamed and patient folly
Sadly rollicks ... after
The props lie up-ended.

Such curtain as closed on you.
And skirting dinner-time,
The cobble-headed crowds retreat . . . retreat . . .
Return to their parcel minds.

What was deserted isn't in any mirror,
Is the old flaw illustrated:
The posters standing their watches.

And wandering of street, at last,
Is twisting or lie,
For nothing is here that truly trod—no entrances,
Nor greatness of vocal vanity
Nor jeweled jig;

Until returning, by high hallway death,
(And his ancient garment riding a broken hanger)
He suddenly sees the changed face of the time, and
 knows
The clocks were all set by himself.

LAKE LATITUDE

Rosalie Moore

The lake apples,
Skins lit with the lake light,
Roll on their brackets of branches.

And the lake flinging the peaks,
Their forests flaring:
These fans of mountain oftenest at the shore
Are marred by the weeds' wire.

Here is a place,
Here is a prison of clear;
Look down to a floor, to a face—
 to a muscle of water;
To a face, to a floor,
To the ceiling of minus-self.

THE MIDNIGHT SHOWBOAT

Virginia Russ

(On Clear Lake, Calif.)

The dance barge circles the hill into the cove:

Banjoes round the bend,
low motors pulsing drum beats
slowly trundle a glittering ark over black waves:

With blue pearls the night is decked:

Cries, laughter . . . (sharpened by highballs)
sifted through distance and night mists,
soften . . . ring with a pure joy of angels:

Oh love, love, your summer dream smothers in
paper roses
Your face of sweet illusion, pales under a neon
moon:

An up-rooted Hawaiian, with tenor nostalgia
compressed within flatness of wax disk
wails in a giant's voice . . . longing for purple
flying fish,
huts of sweet grass, cocoanuts,
and brown girls wriggling in a lanai:

Dragging strands of coal-red electric poppies,
laughter thins to the point of a pin:

The Hawaiian, locked inside juke box,
like the genie in the lamp . . . glows, shouting his
last:

Canned music and the contrived stars,
trailing wake of shattered opals,
rented glamour shimmering . . . slip round the far
bend:

Whiff of honeysuckle on the crisping air,
the night returns to crickets . . .

AGAIN EDEN

Kate Rennie Archer

DEER ON THE SKYLINE

Suddenly, out of man-high brush
Ears flowered, two here, two there,
Petalling against sky,
Curved, brown turning.

Between each two there wakened
Wedge of head,
Dark of moved eye
Above column of deer-neck.

Like bronze irises, tall among weed,
The two-petalled deer-heads
Stemmed out of bushes,
Round ears cupped to wind,
Tight in attention.

The yellow macadam road
Burned garish and brittle;
Chromium fendered, the maroon car
Screamed with sun-glare;
So we left there, and, carefully treading,
Stepped foot-soft through green
Where leafed ears listened,
Where stemmed heads turned against blue.

There was stillness vibrating to wonder,
Of beast, of man;
Silence that cried, "I see you!"
As we stood in grass, observing,
As they stood among tree-brush, watching.

Then cities and aeons fell from us,
Man and the creatures met,
Mutually curious,
And nothing had ever been.

INTERIOR

Elliott R. Bell

Across the room is a young man
With gray hair.

From beginning to end,
He retains all the indications
Of doddering old youth!

Twice across the table
He grasps the knife
With which he may slice into all the years to come.

Only twice,
For in the distance is heard the ear-splitting roar
Of expanding silence;

And all about his house hovers the exterior.

HOUSEWIFE

Hanson Kellogg

She is browned in the skillet, dusted with flour,
 pierced
By impaired paring knives, both dull and pointless,
Skewered, cooked under pressure, steamed,
Roasted and baked, sliced, mixed, beaten,
Toasted.

Nibbled at, devoured, scraped off plates,
Imprisoned in the eleemosynary garbage can;
Victim of sportive dogs, and tense, acquisitive cats,
Disposed of every Monday morning early, to clatter
 and imprecations.

Yet, phoenix from the gas flames, she arises
Too early of a morning, to be browned,
Flour-dusted, pierced ...

NEGRO CHILD LOST

Joseph Joel Keith

The small brown child
in the white suit,
whiter than the smiling faces,
is alien.
Though hands touch gently,
and voices promise
reunion,
the small brown child,
lost in the depot,
feels fear less
than bewilderment;
he does not know them,
these who touch him
not as his mother touches;
he pulls away
meekly
and goes away,
alone,
seeking, seeking
for the brown face
among the white faces.
Brown were the only hands he knew,
and he had never been touched
before
by pity.

SONG FOR A MIDNIGHT DANCE

Charles Angoff

Fierce clarity of sky,
Stark planets
And babbling spaces,
Whirl, stop
And leap again.

Time is a woman,
Never had, forever lost.
Love eludes all creation.

Heaven is a mockery
And history a mad dream.

Hope is an abyss,
Warm and endless,
And sleep its only comforter.

Leap and whirl again.
Whispering eternity
Is the one reality.

ANNIVERSARY I

Eve Merriam

Citizens of love's high country,
We look down loftily at a year ago
And view the immigrants, gloves and suitcase
clutched,
Staring at towers,
Pretending not to be scared.

They arrived in the night and were glad
For they could cling to shadows
And could not see the shadows;
This much, no more, would be enough—
To bind in the darkest dazzle, discover an instant.

Morning came, the blinds flew up, and they were
so amazed
To find the stranger still with them,
Yawning, unsecret, grumpy for coffee,
Permanent head of the family.

Day by day they filled out the proper papers,
Worried for sponsors, waited anxiously,
Correcting their answers, guilty at ink blots and
smudges.

And now they cannot recall the week, the month
they were accepted.
It seems they have been voters always.

ANNIVERSARY II

Eve Merriam

Now novelty gone
The seasons' full circle climbed over and over
 (never look down!)
The round again:

Twice the lilacs have echoed twilight
And their petals swept up as sawdust

The scarlet cry of carnations
Yawning in muted doors

The wind has blown has buckled branches.
Heelmark on shivering leaves.

Oh double double soil and rubble
The gutters go by laden.

So much rain these past two years.
The garden will never bloom the same.

How carol how echo our greensprung night?

Rooted our knowledge
The black earth stained gold with rain

And the tree
Tethered

Through windfaring air

New shoots glisten

Spiraling to sky.

ASSIGNMENTS

Aveline Perkins

(Continuation of a poem presented in the Autumn
1949 number)

6

Pipes do not sprout out of earth
In natural and intestinal shapes.
Where pipes uncoil their volatile lengths,
The annealing oven's rage
Enflames all tendrils
And blueprint convolutions.

Then puffed up—
Its belly packed boa constrictor-full—
With non-fusing sands . . .
The inflexible serpent,
Clutched by the capturing pins and shoe,
Is made a prisoner
Upon the bending table.

Cherry-red, it is noosed by the rope's grasp,
As the windlass wrenches
The racked snake
With seventy-five ton pulling power.

The conversion is excruciating
With spasms of new form.

Hot benders are working
With no precise machines,
But with primitive tools,
With trigonometry in their muscles.

They discipline the pipe's fervor
With rods of water,
Which the pipe resents
With steaming sibilance.

The hisses of the burning beast
Warn the benders
That its touch can wound and kill
The human animal.

Death plucks at the benders' elbows
As they vault
About their bent reptile.
The drenched floor
Is slippery with terror
And awash with menace.

They tame the intractable snake,
Which is conquered and curled forever
In writhing usefulness.

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.

"Faust's Song" by Stephen Spender, from the book, "The Edge Of Being" (Random House) .

Shadowy yet powerful images seem to pour genii-like from this poem's small, twelve line bottle, as the poet longs "To wake on peaks at dawn among the inhuman Rose-towering dreams—O peacocks, fountains, sighs—" The Faustian atmosphere, redolent of the skull on the desk and the ancient vaulted chamber suitable for soul-selling deals with Mephistopheles, is conjured up by the lines "Freed from these cobwebs, dust and phials of knowledge, Would I might in her hell of heaven flit:" Despite its multiplicity of meanings there is no woolly obscurity and the poem has sharp excitement. This constantly changing thrill is the poem's strength. Reading it and rereading it, you might be standing on a sea cliff at night in a thunderstorm, watching the wind driven "white horses" revealed in the split-second glare of lightning flashes. Each flash would present a different image to your eyes. Such imaginative and image-making power has earned for Stephen Spender recognition as one of the great living poets.

Aveline Perkins

"News Item" by H. L. Sutton, "Poetry" (Chicago), June 1949.

This poem by Lee Sutton of Monrovia, California, seems to me a fine example of "eternal contemporaneousness," a phrase so aptly coined by Hayden Carruth. Defined by title as a topic of the day, and by its opening line, "Deep in the third year of the Atomic Age," it nevertheless tells of an experience as old as life itself: the inability of love's dream ever to be fully realized. ". . . a boy has hanged himself for love" defines the theme. Although the poem opens in a low key with lines as understated and terse as a newspaper account, it mounts in drama to a climax by a gradual letting-out of the lines, a delicate lyricism, and by the use of repetition. The last line, a separate stanza, drops to the gentleness of a benediction with a soft last rhyme: "God rest him there." There is a slight fragrance of Housman in the poem, but it is haunting and far away. The real substance is Sutton's own.

Jean Burden

"The Perpetual Sea" by Stephen Weber. *Arizona Quarterly*, Autumn 1949.

Simple statements become startling because of images surrounding them. The sea is not a quiet place because of "the choleric shark crouching in puce/ Forests of habitual false serenity." When we examine these lines, we are convinced by the first juxtaposition of adjective and noun; the second is a feat of note; the third carries us to new awareness. The second stanza says: "The drowned man's bones are shuffled/ Like teeth in the buffeted mouth of the sea." These lines, quite the best here, make effective use of surprise. The mouth of the sea is buffeted, where ordinarily the bones would suffer buffeting. This technique illustrates one of the typical devices of modern poetry, which uses traditional material in startling ways. But the last two lines are an anti-climax to an otherwise strong effort, proving to me, at least, that last lines, like poets, are born, not made.

Lawrence P. Spingarn

"The Park" by Harry Brown. *The New Yorker*, August 6, 1949.

In no other place is time subject to sharper demarcations. The past fills the benches with incredibly loquacious old men and canine-obsessed, leashed women. The future, with which Mr. Brown deals, lies in the children

". . . with roses in their hair

Bright small deceivers . . ."

Through the use of rimed tercets (aaa) and such poeticisms as *lea* the author achieves an archaic effect. The reader is dazzled into hypnosis by the sun-drenched colors of grass and sky, until all reality becomes as stylized and one-dimensional as a medieval tapestry, as delightful

and distorted, and as timeless. The piece shows the craftsmanship of the poet in a genre quite different from the bulk of his prewar work.

Hanson Kellogg

"Giacometti" by Richard Wilbur. The Tiger's Eye, March 1949.

Richard Wilbur, throughout his longish poem written after the poet's visit to the artist's studio, builds in rare qualities characteristic of modern poetry: masculinity without coarseness and vulgarity, robustness without abstruseness, artistic clarity without a telescoped simplicity. He speaks of rock "hard and so boldly browed," and of man's "patient rage," and of the heavenward-looking "habitants of stone" leaning to a thought of striding "Toward some concluded war." In sequence after sequence, we find the hard, the right phrase, not a mere cleverness bearing no relationship to theme. Obviously serious and disciplined, Mr. Wilbur has avoided the temptations of many of his contemporaries, the cerebral poet and poetaster alike. The writer, in a strong and beautiful poem like "Giacometti," penned with masculine vigor, can be enjoyed by the old and the new poet, traditionalist and experimentalist who dwell not in ivory towers or private cells, and he can also instruct both.

Joseph Joel Keith

"The Lengthening of Hems" by Maureen Cobb Mabbott. Reprinted from "The Saturday Review of Literature" in "Poetry Awards 1949" (University of Pennsylvania Press).

One of the prize poems in "Poetry Awards 1949" is this hauntingly beautiful poem in irregular blank verse which first appeared in "The Saturday Review of Literature." Its theme, the maturing of a child "Slowly past the unhappy thirteenth year" and her inevitable growing apart from the parent, brings its own slow cadences. The mood evoked (and how unfortunately little modern poetry has to do with mood) is similar to that of a dance seen mistily in a dream, the poignance softened. "Turn, turn, and face to face upon the stair Full in my glance she meets the grown heart's-rage: I love you, I cannot help you. Turn, turn. The chime of shadows falls upon the room Where April, deaf to pity in the air, Whirls in mirrored green reflections: Turn again." This is romanticism, surely, but eternal in its clear insight, its tenderness.

Jean Burden

"Train Journey" by Judith Wright. Reprinted from "Meanjin" in "Poetry Awards 1949" (University of Pennsylvania Press).

Judith Wright does not describe the endless Australian landscape with its small heroic trees; she experiences it as it moves past her train window "purposeful under the great dry flight of air." She can assume this attitude of familiarity or identification, because, in her case, it is the "country that built my heart." The poem draws its emotional momentum from the earth's very core; this centric tension tends to displace even the speed of the train. The trees, delegated by the poet to be the symbol of all living things, are implored to fill themselves with a sense of obligation toward the vast inorganic portion of the universe:

"Be over the blind rock a skin of sense;
under the barren height a slender dance."

In Judith Wright Australia has a voice that speaks not
only for the people of a young nation, but for the very soil
of a mysterious continent.

Grover Jacoby

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

The San Francisco Bay region is recognized as an important center of literary activity. Half the verse in this issue is the work of poets living in that area who have studied with Lawrence Hart at some period in their careers. Mr. Hart, a resident of Berkeley, is the greatest teacher of creative writing in the West.

ROSALIE MOORE'S "The Grasshopper's Man and Other Poems" was chosen by W. H. Auden for the "Yale Series of Younger Poets."

"The Fountain," a poetic drama by VIRGINIA RUSS, was recently produced with a musical background by the San Francisco Musical Club in the Marine Memorial Theater.

GERTRUDE MAY LUTZ has contributed to "The American Mercury," "Accent," "Voices," etc.

KATE RENNIE ARCHER, the author of six books of verse, conducts classes in versification at three important schools near San Francisco.

ELLIOTT BELL closes the list of poets of the Bay Region. Since he has come to Oakland recently, it is probable that he has never studied with Mr. Hart.

AVELINE PERKINS contributed reviews to "The New Statesman and Nation" when he lived in London.

JOSEPH JOEL KEITH, editor and columnist, has reviewed books for the "Saturday Review of Literature," "Tomorrow," "Wings," "Prairie Schooner," etc.

A poem by HANSON KELLOGG appears in the January issue of "Poetry."

CHARLES ANGOFF is managing editor of "The American Mercury." One of his short stories recently appeared in the "Arizona Quarterly."

EVE MERRIAM'S "Family Circle" was selected by Archibald Macleish for the "Yale Series of Younger Poets." "New Directions" has also published her poems.

JEAN BURDEN is a poets' poet; Leslie Nelson Jennings, Marcia Masters, and HANSON KELLOGG all agree on the very real significance of her achievement.

"The Climate Within" by Lawrence Perry Spingarn is among the poems appearing in "Poetry Awards 1949." This poem first appeared in "Variegation." Last year Mr. Spingarn was a member of the faculty at