

A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY

VARIEGATION

VOLUME V / SPRING 1950

A reading edition from the complete issue

18

ISSUE 18

V A R I E G A T I O N

A Free Verse Quarterly

Volume V · Spring 1950 · Number 2

*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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GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

FARALLON FOG

M. A. Mays

Lifting a fragment of ocean
without weight,
fog moves creaseless
over floating bells—
grey smoke of sea.

Bodiless-soundless—
none may hold it,
flow of cold cloud
over cry of murre.

THE ACTUARY

Myron H. Broomell

Admittedly false,
The proposition of mastery
Causes its minions to succumb.

Their rights a dream,
Their will to fight blood-let,
They say Yes, sir and give in.

Who shall explore the dimensions of dominion?—
Whether it comes clad in ermine
Or statistics.

To give an example:
Tsitsibue, the industrialist,
Allowed his employees to contribute a fund
To pay costs
Of their final burial.

THE PROFESSOR

Myron H. Broomell

I was going down the street lately
When an acquaintance hailed me,
Asking after my health and that of the college.
“That too I also ask after,” said I—
As I thought, ambiguously.

Yet did he spread it about the town
That things were amiss with education.

THE APHORIST AT MIDDLE AGE

Hanson Kellogg

The hoary colporteur of winter knocks;
Speechless he presents mementoes mori.
But Hell becomes a cozy thought
Against the blast he admits.

My sins have been expiated
By the only universal penitence: ennui.
Seeds alone are large enough
To contain spring,
Not the broken lances of dried mullein stalks
That mud takes over from the puddle glazier.

The fire blown out, the breeze begins to breathe
Warm and alive again.
And the sins, it seems, were only expatiated on.

APPRAISEMENT

Hanson Kellogg

This is the hard enduring thing, not diamonds:
Life without purpose, death divorced from destiny.
The rubies paste; the emeralds glass; the eyes
Seeking the skill behind the counterfeit,
Neglecting the crucible, the furnace and the
 hands,
The lighting, the brushed velvet, the salesman's
 dream ...

Eternity is static,
Time passes with the traffic breeze along the street.

DURING OFFICE HOURS

Hanson Kellogg

He has disappeared in a flurry of dried leaves:
Multicolored,
Printed, mimeographed, typed in triplicate,
Scrawled on, embossed with the seal, the proper
stamp
Affixed, and the pad ink not yet dried
From the rubber facsimile of signature.

Three paragraphs of a subsection of the statute
As revised
In anno Domini nineteen hundred and aught six
Specifically prohibit his leaving at this time,
Quite without notice, appointing no successor,
Failing to command a substitute pro tem.
The penalties are both severe and mandatory.

Since, however, the glasses case, the desk set, the
vacuum water carafe,
The dictating machine, the pictures of his three
wives
And the boy
Still adorn the inner office,
Those walls distempered by signed photographs
Of former governors and indicted representatives,
He cannot have gone far.
He cannot have gone intestate.
He cannot be out at this hour, under the sun and
the wind

Where the russet leaves pick sharp at the edge of
turned earth
And gather in drifts for its turning under again.
He cannot have gone with election so close in the
past.
The voters have given him mandate; he never
escaped from praise.

NECK VERSE

Hanson Kellogg

I joined the organization in nineteen thirty-two.
The objectives seemed as laudable as some of
the sponsors.
It afforded a warm place to escape the park.
The air in the hall smelled fresher than the old
food—
Although I should have enjoyed eating it—
In the cafeteria where I hunched over the grey
clotted cold coffee.
I attended while it seemed an answer.
Then I found other answers and returned
seldom.
Since, while I have been working, fighting and
working again,
The nation has been playing musical chairs with
enemy and ally.
The party is over now; we are saying perfunctory
goodbyes in the doorway.
The evening air is cold; the corner cafe still
steams and stinks.
Gentlemen of the committees, what will I join
this time round? ●

THE INTESTATE

Hanson Kellogg

At Armageddon we shall leave,
Suddenly, not fearing to disturb,
North to the snow and its spawned arbutus;
Valleys to short and uniform trees
Choked in the rich poisoned mash of their discarded
fruit;

Mountains to the sifting of tiny lethal dust:
Grey breath on blue ice;
Cities to the deepening rust, eating out the gleam
Of the tinned iron cylinders, to the trodden gum
wads

Ground black into the pavement shards;
South to the moss, that air-fed coral,
Haughtily oblivious of blasted oak and pine
Its fragility depends from.

And the sea will still pant
In eternal pursuit of the long sands
Under the reach of cloud shadow.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Helen Frith Stickney

Now we will halt destiny
with the noise of bells,
with voices and laughter
and whistles shrilling:
“This is change—
this is a beginning!”

We clutch at time's heel
in merriment
as it slips out of unsteady hands;
even as we sense that tomorrow
is but yesterday, continuing—
we do not heed.

“This change—
this is a beginning.”

The night is raucous
with shouting,
with the multitude
blowing tin horns
into the face of darkness.

CHAOS

Marjorie Boulton

Cavities in the air:
matrices
above the star of leaves.
The flower will open in a week.

Unattached personalities
of ungenerated posterity
trouble the wet laurels
and December roses.

The shoes at the door
almost neigh
to be laced and gallop on a taut rein.

Unwritten poems
clot the upper air,
a thick layer,
viscous, moving
secretions of total mind
back and forth.

13.

BITTER SOLSTICE

John Barron Mays

The lonely day
All loverless
Goes over

Winter
With sleety hands
Subdues trees
And tramples
Iron frost into the mould

There is no rest from the wind
And in the world no fire
No latch
Lifted in greeting

No rest till time repents
And with a kiss
Spring cancels
The winter martyrdom

BEACH MORNING-GLORY

Rosalie S. Jacoby

The sand lies pale and ageless
Marking the centuries.
Frail lavender sand flowers
Open inverted parasols
For a day
And close them forever—
One day that is the archetype
Of eternal loveliness.

CONSOLATION FROM THE ARCTIC

John Atkins

There is something to be learnt from the Arctic,
swaying and moving in the defeat of life,
opening its caverns to sunless air,
in the face of oblivion refusing servility,
but impressing its iron bulk on the slim shoulders of
the world.

Think of the Arctic, dear, when, in adversity,
you see your sorrows silting up the year
and little pains scratching your nerves like sparrows.
There is no inevitability to condemn
your lovely head to a season's fatal anger.

NOT YET, AT ANY RATE

Grover Jacoby

They are not yet two-by-fours,
Nor joists,
Nor shingles.
Pouring from vital stalks
The ray of foliage,
They are the living wood.

POEM REVIEWS

"The Right Answers" by Joseph Warren Beach. *Western Review*, Fall, 1949.

The more one reads this poem, the better it seems. The prosody is relaxed and the diction seems naive—for example, the unsophisticated yet thought-provoking "anyhow" in the next to last line—but the whole lyric moves forward irresistibly to a dynamic conclusion. The situation may be simply (and prosaically) stated: "Eros" finds an old man in a graveyard, attempting to ponder the meaning of the life now nearly past. Thus confronted, the old man realizes that life cannot be evaluated in terms of death, but only in terms of life, whose meaning is love. Since one knows that the poet here has reached an age of retirement, one is led to think of the famous and flawless quatrain of Landor's, written at an advanced age, in which Landor looks back on life and calls it good. But here the statement is far nobler and more magnificent. Landor says, "I have lived." Professor Beach says—virtually, whether intentionally or not—"I cannot die."

Myron H. Broomell

"Litany" by Robert Horan, from the book, "A Beginning" (Yale University Press.)

"Litany" seems indivisible: I would not transpose, change, or delete any of it. The poem makes me believe I could not, and therein lies its invulnerability.

"Among the skeletons of sun
where the yellow lions run
goes one in a diamond color,
tears on his antique shoulders."

Although some of the lines (stanza 2) are not so good as the best lines, this does not disappoint as it does occasionally, when one runs into too great softness in some of Mr. Horan's other work. "Litany" rests complete, as if in suspension: leaving us to admire the skilled use of paradox (in imagery and statement) and particularly the wonderful foreshortened lyricism, in which the word-line remains short, while the sung line continues in the head:

"The most amiable and best beloved host.
Of these he is my God longest,
and shall be least lost
and last blessed."

Rosalie Moore

"Scene by Recollection" by Jeanne McGahey. "Number," Spring, 1950.

Jeanne McGahey's poetry, to me, is notable for clarity. I do not mean, certainly, that it is over-explicit, bent on explaining itself. I refer

to the direct openness of her writing. In this poem clear impression follows clear impression, so that if the poem were a hand-built wall, and each unit of the poem a stone, you would say of the stones, "There are just enough, and they hold." And because of the magic involved you would also say that the stones flew together, or were dropped from above. The poem is a nostalgic recollection of a lost place: "The children rose up out of the sea grass With the sound of a thousand swallows . . . They hunted as tigers the marguerites

(But will not be found there now by fours and fives

In the dry trails.)" And this sunlight and absence will not exist again, save in Miss McGahey's poem. For in poetry only can the loved thing be, yet be lost.

Rosalie Moore

"A Worn Theme" by Ruth Pitter. *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Winter 1950.

Like all her chiseled verse this latest utterance of the distinguished English poet, Ruth Pitter, makes its own eloquent testimony:

"Brightest is soonest gone—

But O gone where?

When we are left alone

When rainbows faint in air . . .

"Ah, when a beauty is dead

Its soul goes home."

Ruth Pitter excels in the kind of tight writing where every line is pared to the essential word, and a whole lifetime of inner experience condensed to a single stanza. Here is passion but controlled; here is suffering transmuted by the heart's vision. "A Worn Theme" is an apologetic title for this poem. It is an eternal theme, and

Ruth Pitter has given it beautiful voice.

"Let us go, let us go
To their immortal day,
For all we have to do
Is to be fair as they,
And die, and flee away."

Jean Burden

"Rain" by Francis Sweeney. *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 190.

Poetry, in recent years considered literature's Cinderella, has one high-riding advantage over her fat, rich sister Prose. Poetry can magically evoke with a few lines, with a few deft flourishes, entrancing pictures mountainously larger than the few words consumed by the incantation. In sixteen lines Francis Sweeney calls up with verbal necromancy the bewitching experience of lying in bed, listening to the rain. A simple experience. How hard to capture it successfully! The poet lies

"in the liquid dark"; and is "Roofed with rain, chambered with running sound." Because to me as a child the distant sound of a train was as much part of natural nocturnal conditions as moonlight, the wind in the trees, or pre-dawn birdsong, I especially relished the lines: "In the intimate distance the train struts like a lonely idiot Playing giant-steps behind the hill." "Rain" is tucked away on page 53 of *The Atlantic*, at the end of an article, and is in fact a "filler" poem. Yet in the small space it fills is power that is "glamorous" in the ancient, witchcraft meaning of the word.

Aveline Perkins

“Warming the Hands” by K.A.W. Poetry: The Magazine of The British Poetry Association, Autumn, 1949.

The question is asked whether the coming of Spring is experienced by the plant world as a painful wiry sensation comparable to that of the revival of frost-bitten hands. The sinewy rhythm of these pentameters and hexameters conveys this “agony of spring” which is “making brittle twigs/Supple again in suffering.” The implication of the poet’s query extends to all growth and flowering. Must all beauty be won at such painful cost: “And petals bloom like blood, and gathered pain Cries out in consummated ecstasy?” No one will accuse K.A.W. of approaching Primavera with the usual zephyrs nor any of the other familiar blandishments. Even “ecstasy,” usually so overworked, serves here to carry an intense and very modern connotation.

Grover Jacoby

“Birth of a Song” by Peter Viereck. Harpers Magazine, March, 1950.

“And who am ‘I’?”—queries Peter Viereck. Most human beings ask themselves this at one time or another. Nor to the best of our knowledge has anyone yet received a satisfactory answer. Divided into three sections, the poem is strange, not easy to understand, but nonetheless fascinating for being so many-faceted. The ego, the self, or whatever the mysterious “I” is labelled, is compared to a bird. The poet puts forward the thesis that we are trapped within our abode of blood and bones just as the bird is caught within its own feathers and its own birdlife. However, Mr. Viereck sees compensation in this corporeal prison and bids the

"Great hooting flapping ruffled ego, close
Your hopeless wings again and bless aloud-"
... "This sweet snug roost." Peter Viereck intimates
there's much to be said for being human.

Aveline Perkins

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Last year, poems from “Variegation” by HANSON KELLOGG and Jean Burden were reprinted on the editorial page of the Sunday New York Herald Tribune.

HELEN FRITH STICKNEY has served as a vice-president of the Poetry Society in America and is the author of two books. One of these, “Prelude to Winter,” is a prize-winning volume.

AVELINE PERKINS is still working on his industrial epic, “Assignments.”

ROSALIE MOORE is a recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship for creative writing in the field of poetry.

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The names of both Myron Broomell and Jean Burden are often seen in Poetry (Chicago). A poem by Mr. Broomell recently appeared in Furioso.

JOHN ATKINS used to edit the “New Saxon Review.” MARJORIE BOULTON, JOHN BARRON MAYS, and Mr. Atkins are British poets.