

A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY

VARIEGATION

VOLUME VI / SUMMER 1951

A reading edition from the complete issue

23

ISSUE 23

V A R I E G A T I O N

A Free Verse Quarterly

Volume VI · Summer 1951 · Number 3

*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

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

VARIATION: A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY is published by
Variation Publishing Co., Room 540, 124 West 4th Street,
Los Angeles 13, California. 25¢ a copy, \$1.00 a year.

GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

A GARDEN PLOT OF EPHEMERALS

Hanson Kellogg

Our cut flowers
Are no longer spread for sale.
Now and then we rent their fragrance out
To scent scamped ceremonies,
Or we give the vivid things away.

□

Rags become you, scarecrow.
Any weed does better in the dust.
Dust is the sour answer effort wins,
The last and the complete cosmetic
To stain a silent face.

Procrastination: thief perhaps,
But chiefly critic.
What you have never dealt with
Cannot haunt you.

Strange lengths of air
Disturbed by walls
Hold time enclosed until the whole
Disintegrates.

Not time and the weather take
Our idols' heads and limbs, but wear and tear,

Hoisting them to pedestals,
Knocking them off to tramped and muddied grass.

□

No word is ever final as a gesture
A hand upon a door perhaps . . .
White hand, white door,
And only metal in between.

□

Who of those obsessed by myth
Has never seen the other permutations:
Beauty altered to companion Beast,
Beast and Beauty changing places?

□

No ending can in essence be unhappy.
Only no ending can.

Now comes the season without season:
Day dissolved by darkness,
Nights rectified by dawn,
When the gnomon of the sundial
Casts no shadow nor the alder
On the pool.

At least we make no claim
To having wrung
Aphorisms from an ancient land
To bring them here like seeds or stanchioned cattle
In holds beneath exploring sails:

THE HERITAGE

Hanson Kellogg

The child, clutching his father's hand,
Looks up. "What do they say?"
He listens, learns and nods.
Thus the walls begin;
Mere pebbles in a row at first, they rise
And form a frame of reference
To segment earth and heaven.

NOW THE QUIETING

Dorothy Millikin

The hills, brown and subdued,
Lie like velvet mounds.
I would reach out and caress them,
Laying my hands upon their soft greatness,
 And feel them rise and fall
Like breasts with their breathing.
If I could lay my head down
In some warm crevice
Between the mothering velvet mounds
And sleep;
There would I rest.

DOMESTIC YEAR

Emily White

Diffused but warmed
 laughter
Broke off
On the unmoving sun
Stuck in the window,
Like a window cloth.

Wandered among the closet shadows
Where the dust
Moved out like a moth
To amorous-exultation in cloth.

The door moved
 needled with questions
Intercepted by the creeping wind:

Cut in with shadow
Larded with the windowed sun
The day
 hung like a husk.

Outside
 the summer clattered on leaves.
Outside
 the winter wind
 lowed off
 the leafless trees.

SHEPHERD

Rosalie Moore

Stephen, shepherd, son of shepherd
Of the keepers of the sheep of Cloyes
(The bees of Saladin he saw not yet, but sheep)
Walked after sheep his lives as if
One life to live to one sheep:
And the good ones whispered the grass or
Came, standing . . . but the lost ones
Followed the moon into the hill,
Were gone with a guise of fog.

Stephen at cold croak
Listened—the fields still wet,
The dice in the town all thrown
And the sky's set of marks
Scattered, knocking with light:

And he rose as to look, but knowing that they
were gone
He remembered the dim face of the ewe:
"She was nothing to me then, a part of the
fleece
But now she is bleak of moon, she is
My ragged and country face."

Note: This poem is intended to form part of a long work which, when completed, will tell the story of the "Children's Crusade" in 1212 A.D.

THE GREAT RIDER

Grover Jacoby

Circling leisurely
The gulls pull in the sky,
Curbing its vastness.

The steed loves the graceful restrictions,
The reins of plumed aviation
Held by Life,
The invisible Rider.

ONE ASPECT OF POSEIDON

Grover Jacoby

Out of the winter dimness
And vast fume,
The waves well upwards
With reiterated obscurities
And a complete lack of precision.
To him the damp element
Is a rocking chair of the mind.
He will go on like that:
One generalization after another,
Each one more mountainous
And mobile
Than the last.

OCTOPUS

Eunice Clise

Stealing around a coral fan
Snakelike arms of the octopus
Timidly feel along the ocean floor.
Up in the fleshy dome of eye and beak
His evil eyes unfold themselves
To fix the fragile creatures of the green,
Wavy-finned and bending with the sea.
Sensing him and danger
They are muscle, action,
Flight for life,
Bird flight in water,
Upsweep of terror and of fear.

FINITE

Eunice Clise

Knuckles of fate
At the nape of my neck,
Net of night closing about me,
Smash what resists you,
Twist it in a knot.
I will yet emerge
Incandescent.

PANTOMIME

Gertrude Schleier

The snow winds
Subtly, softly,
Like a clean, white bandage
Binding earth's hurts,
Earth's wounds;
Binding the open crevasses
Where men have marched
With bloodstained boots;
Binding the scars
Of ploughshare and sword,
Binding and cleansing
The ever recurring scars;
And whispering
Silver-white whispers
Of pity—
As though the earth
Were a child in agony,
A child not fully grown.

BIG SUR

Eric Wilson Barker

I lose faith in words in this country.
Better to leave unsaid
the poems that cannot describe the highest arcs
of turning and turning hawks, the mountainous
voyaging leisure of animal-changing clouds.
What words released from this granite shoulder
can return like a cliff-falling gull
translating a mood of the sea?
Or strike such wild notes as two hawks now
down-circling their hazardous air?
Better let the truth be spoken
by what inhabits here from birth:
the autochthonous voice
interpreting its own environment.
Better to stand and listen to sounds
not alien here.

DIRGE FOR A DEAD MANUSCRIPT

Eric Wilson Barker

This beach has a stagnant smell.
Enough nostalgic matter breeds flies
to make a funeral hymn for what the tides
have left sultry and slow-eating suns
from refuse of dead seasons.
Come away.

Were these the fish with shining scales
that I drew forth from that lake of dreams?—
these dead eyes and old bones?—
this beach flotsam?
(And yours the nets that caught them,
old cobwebs of my brain!)
Oh, leave this stale and memory-cluttered sand.

The mesh is stronger now.
It is woven with the thread of new thoughts.
I will find the beach where the fishers have not yet
come in the blue morning
and cast my nets again in the sea.

POEM REVIEWS

RIDDLE ME THAT by Patrick Galvin. Poetry Ireland, No. 11. One would describe the work of Patrick Galvin as highly original, were it not that originality has come to seem too contrived a thing (“Etonnez-moi, Jean”), whereas Galvin is nothing if not spontaneous. Of all poets this young beginner is nearest perhaps to Dylan Thomas, but his real kingdom, one feels, is balladry in its more “meaningless” phases.

As I went up the Slippery Gap
The birds were high
The ditch was low
But I still walked the Winter Gap
Breathing clearly and holding my jug.

But no extract can give any notion of this poet’s gift, which isn’t at all that of fine phrasing, but of sustaining throughout the poem a note that is at once “daft” and movingly simple. The phrase, “Riddle Me That,” is a common prelude to country conundrums in Ireland, and one feels that the significance of this young poet will depend on whether he has an answer—withheld by all means—to his riddles, a key to his “Parade.”

Terence Smith

HYDROGEN AGE by Stanton A. Coblentz. The Christian Century, March 14, 1951. A poem is rarely shorter than a quatrain, but a quatrain may be sufficient if it contains the essence of poetic imagination. This poem’s pattern is strongly stressed iambic pentameter couplets, perfectly attuned to the starkness of the thought. It has taken “half a hundred thousand iron years” for man to climb out of the

cave. Some scientists might have used a longer

span of time, but the poet need not be a mathematician. Here in a striking figure, "science herds us back into the cave." From its title, this poem on first reading might seem to be an expression of despair. But to this reviewer, Mr. Coblentz employs the same device as was used by Millay in "Epitaph for the Race of Man," turning an imminent threat of doom into a challenge to meet "the present crisis" as man has met his crises in the past on the slow climb toward a civilized society.

Snow Longley Housh

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

ERIC WILSON BARKER'S poem, "Small Oasis," was recently selected for inclusion in Poetry Awards 1951. The poem first appeared last year in Recurrence.

Two poems by HANSON KELLOGG were printed in 1950 in the quarterly published by Beloit College.

EMILY WHITE has studied with Lawrence Hart. Her work is represented in the May issue of Poetry.

GERTRUDE SCHLEIER lives in New York.

EUNICE CLISE'S work is to be found in the current issues of both Recurrence and Variegation.

ROSALIE MOORE received one of the Guggenheim awards last year. She is the sister-in-law of the poet, Jeanne McGahey.

DOROTHY MILLIKIN is a sculptress living in Southern California.

SNOW LONGLEY HOUSH'S work for poetry in the public schools continues to receive recognition, although she retired from teaching a few years ago.

TERENCE SMITH is one of the editors of Irish Writing.