

A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY

VARIEGATION

VOLUME VI / AUTUMN 1951

A reading edition from the complete issue

24

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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GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

DAYS PRING

Jean Burden

It is not so far to come
from shadow to this season;
from the grey meadow of sleep
to this pale room,
and this garden.
It is not so hard
in May
for the thin ghost to put on
the thin body,
and move again toward a world
opaque.

In spring I close the door
and walk toward day,
slowly through a grey garden,
scuffing green persimmons, nameless leaves,
noting how a cupped flower
knows the shape of rain,
and how the morning ground
remembers night.
So I move toward voices not my own,
trailing the memory
of another place.

OF THE UNPOSSESSED

Marjorie Hansen

This is of slowness
As the lift of tree,
And warmth of swelling grain.

This is of dearness unutterable,
The kindly smile,
The word unsaid (nay, not known!),
The hand not touched.

This is of sadness
For, unsought, it must remain
Unknown.
And the grown garden
Must fade, unseen,
Untouched.

PRELUDE TO SLEEP

Eunice Clise

Beyond the mist of yearning
My eyes fall on darkened space.
Arrows strike beneath the lids
When I close them against the night.
Like a wave breaking is the longing I feel
 for your nearness,
And emptiness slips beneath my hands.

CONFLICT

Elizabeth Welch Craig

The wind runs her long nervous fingers
Through the grass.
Ill at ease,
She paces back and forth,
Picks up old leaves,
Then drops them.
The wind is jaded,
Weary, seeking rest
In mindless effort.

CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Welch Craig

Observe the lover's face,
Bland as a clock's.
There's no apology in it
For the brief, urgent, passing time.
Indifferent, as are all things mechanical,
It registers no trace of magic hours,
No truth, except impermanency.

Calm, cruel, impassive faces
Carelessly marking hours of time,
Hours of love.

ELECTROPHOBIA

David Palmer

The white electric-light bulb
is bare
it is without a cover
it has nothing on it
the cover is gone
the light blasts out
with no walls to keep it in
to hide it
to quiet it
it is alone in this room
with me
that is
there is no one here but me
I am here alone with the light bulb
the electric-light bulb

SCENE FROM A WINDOW

Charlene Palmer

The night is such a
black green luminous
where the green is
the houses are too
dark against the dark sky
a telephone pole is tilted
it looks like a tall cross
but Christ is not there
only the wires
and the green light reflecting

ESSAY ON A BROKEN SHADOW

David Palmer

Where is the girl with the warm lips and quiet eyes
walking alone in the sunset?

Searching is an insolent business—
finding only traces
and abstraction (even the midnight roar of the truck
on the highway cannot be captured from the dust)
finding only evidence and never really—
never the flashing blast of now (even the soft
moonlight trickles off into yesterday and tomorrow).

ANTHOLOGY IN BRAILLE

Joseph Joel Keith

Here is deep sight:

of the veined leaf,
traced,
quietly fingered;

of the blossom,
the bough,
the root
that is nurtured;

the hands touching
the tops of trees,
all warmed
by sun and lore.

Here is deep sight:

in the heart's hands,
in cerebral fingers
the pulp of knowledge;
eyes, unseen,
seeing
from the fingers' tips.

CELLINI SALT CELLAR

Gertrude May Lutz

Was this a container for salt? This boat-shaped urn
lifted on legend?

The mind, thinking prosaics—cast, chased on gold,
enameled, figured . . . suddenly
beholds the myth: Tellus and Neptune
enthroned on blossomed Earth,
on stallion-headed Sea—feet intertwined,
symbol of elements' union—symbol,
saved long ago by royal decree
that we, centuries later,
gaze with our multiple eyes: stare
at personifications of four winds—
quadruple time; witness,
embossed with crown, with flame-surrounded
salamander, triumphal arch with letter F—

(of France?) (of Francis I?)

O wonder this: lowly grains . . . were they the same
out of this ornate vessel?

Dipped up with dilettante fingers,
was the taste then—as now—
something of sting? of tang?
something of blanch-boned sea?
something of human tears?
Was the taste . . . salt?

ASSIGNMENTS

Aveline Perkins

*(Continuation of the poem wherein each numbered
Assignment covers a different industry or science.)*

15

Drills experience
Immense immersion
In oceans of earth and rolling strata;
Between the lines of the chart
Even stars will be exploited
By bowelward plunging
Into unfathomed earth.

Haphazard drills
Once groped in solid darkness,
Floundered through uncertain muds,
And blundering
Staggered
Toward the calf of golden grease.

Now the slippery quarry is sniffed out
By hounds
With scientific noses;
Controlled vertical drilling
Takes up
The hue and cry for oil,
As angle indicators*
And timing elements fantastically accurate
Take the pulse of gravity,

Make certain
The punching home
Of intractable corkscrews.

Drift records,
Correct to a degree's fraction,
Prevent human and inhuman wandering
From courses delicate but obdurate.

* * *

Blood of the monsters
Soothes
The new fleshless saurians,
And is a balm upon
The raw edges of metal limbs joined
In metal lockstep.

Ointment for speed,
Oil is an unguent assuring
The ease of moving parts
And the health of motors.

* Today oilwell drillers are guided by mechanical "seeing eye worms"—direction finders which are dropped down the drill pipe and register any deviation from the vertical; if you were drilling a well, and went off at an angle even as little as three degrees, and sustained this error for a 1000 feet, you would wander 52 feet horizontally away from the vertical.

Oil heals
The unceasing deadly wounds of the machine.

16

Computermen are unable to compete
With the electric analogue computer,
Whose brain weighs a ton,

Whose cortex seethes
With 500 control circuits.

Beside its speeding, brainless brainchild*
The human intellect limps;
The fleshed fibers fail;
Wires of monstrous metal genius
Promise and threaten.

Switches question
The charged oracle.
Factors are transformed
By currents of mindlessness
In seconds into answers
Forever unanswerable by minds.

* * *

Comprehend the incomprehensible,
The reprehensible and perilous
Paraclete

* In cybernetics, the science of mechanical thought, mathematicians employ huge automatic brains which, according to the warning of some scientists, might turn one day into mental Frankenstein monsters.

Of whom shapes and auguries
Rise from the smoke of works

Whose inanimate entrails
Bellow soundlessly
Of miracles and horror.
Upon further, desperate consultation,
The motor mouth quivers

In deafening silence—
Its supercharged lips
Froth
With a wordstream
Too fast to speak,
Yet impart
A single, damning inspiration:

“Machines become more human—
Men
More like machines.”

POEM REVIEWS

PAEAN from the book, *Attics Own Houses*, by Hanson Kellogg. Allen Swallow, Publisher. Although it is not Mr. Kellogg's acrid taste to praise, "Paeon" is still representative of his finest work, and that is very fine indeed. It is also a winning introduction to "Attics Own Houses," one of the most exciting new books of poetry to be published in a long time. Like all his work "Paeon" is spun on the tensile wires of an honest, observing mind; there is no fatty tissue here. Mr. Kellogg long ago ceased to hunt for comfort among the gray and moulding cliches. There is consolation only in stripping bare, and the truth he finds is not always pretty. "I honor the small, the shodden men, whose eyes/Are smoothed off dim from the magnificence of distances." He writes often of the poor, the partial, the beaten, but always with a wry compassion. Despite the anguish there is never distortion. There is realism but no ugliness. He ends with these lines: "But there is no wind between the stars./The planets have no home save their solemnity." Astringent, yes. Like a dash of cold water in the face of the complacent!

Jean Burden

EMPATHY AT EVENING by Louise Townsend Nicholl. *The Saturday Review of Literature*. July 21st, 1951. In what W. H. Auden calls "the age of anxiety," it is a delightful experience to find a lyric whose lines flow smoothly into a theme that expresses the beauty, the mystic qualities, and,

to a degree, the awareness of the simple, homely things concordant with everyday living. This theme which, in the hands of the amateur, might easily fall into the category of pathetic fallacy, is lifted by the art of the creator, to the level of authentic poetry. Here we find “the creatures of wood grow static and profound,” “and what’s not wood partakes the purely human view of what is good,” “The proud forks shining in the gloom,” and finally those fortunate and exciting last lines: “and beauty must abide only within the mind, where soon will slide the paneled silk integument of sleep.”

Lucille Evans

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

GERTRUDE MAY LUTZ was awarded the Norfolk prize. Mark Van Doren was the judge.

ELIZABETH WELCH CRAIG lives in Superior, Wisconsin. She is Variegation's first contributor from the state of Wisconsin.

MARJORIE HANSEN lives in San Francisco.

CHARLENE PALMER is Mrs. DAVID PALMER. Both Mr. and Mrs. Palmer are taking postgraduate courses at the University of California at Los Angeles.

A poem by JEAN BURDEN appears in the Summer issue of Recurrence.

AVELINE PERKINS' first play was produced recently at the Pasadena Community Playhouse.

Mrs. EUNICE CLISE lives in Seattle with her two children.

Without the assistance of JOSEPH JOEL KEITH the American issue of Kavita (Calcutta, India) would never have materialized. Mr. Bose, the editor of Kavita, makes this acknowledgment in the excellent bilingual issue.

Nineteen poems from three issues of Variegation appear in The Hadley Anthology of Magazine Verse. Among the authors of these poems are Hanson Kellogg, Marcia Masters, JOSEPH JOEL KEITH, Lucille Evans, Margaret J. E. Brown, Lawrence P. Spingarn, Elinor Lennen, Edith E. Hewins, and the editor of Variegation. The Hadley Anthology is printed in Braille.