

A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY

VARIEGATION

VOLUME IX / WINTER 1954

A reading edition from the complete issue

33

ISSUE 33

V A R I E G A T I O N

A Free Verse Quarterly

Volume IX · Winter 1954 · Number 33

*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 Company. 25¢ a copy, \$1.00 a year.

All correspondence for *Variegation: A Free Verse Quarterly* and
Recurrence: A Quarterly of Rhyme should be addressed to
Variegation Publishing Company, Post Office Box 9384,
Sanford Station, Los Angeles 5, California.

GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

A I R

Leah Bodine Drake

Adaptable element, fluid to all things' wills,
yet by its lack their master,
air is the matrix where we hollow out
personal Merlin-towers of glass
to live marvelously castled!

Moving askew as wind
air unwinds the crossed ribbons of its maypole dance,
blowing ships and seeds, breaking the backs of trees,
keeping the globe, that travels widdershins,
still spinning with its tugging westerlies.
Quiet, air holds up butterflies,
spreads traffic lanes for hummingbirds and bombers
but betrays acrobats and apples.

Cambered roof against the rays of space,
the yonder with its vanishing iris,
theatre of fire and mirages,
keyboard of sound:
how may we speak sufficiently of air
by whose presence in our bagpipe-breasts
we make our passionate music?

Yet this inseparable companion is never seen
in its purest state:
immaculate spirit must embrace the clay

to be made visible to earthy eyes.
So air collects salt, sand, dust, sublimes to ice and
 snow,
turns cloud and piles up sunsets and thunder
and, like the pity of a god made flesh,
lays on just tree and unjust thirsting man
the fingers of its catholic rain.

MY NIRVANA

Cecil Kyle

A palace.of jade,
Cool tall arches,
Verdure of a gem's delicate lines
Pointing to infinity . . .
Where the loudest music
Is the passing of shadows.

INTERVAL

Cecil Kyle

As a feather
Dropped on a soft cloud,
I yield to the dull muffling
Of sleep
Deep in the darkness
That the embryo feels,
Soundless as falling snow.
Only the smell of hair
And perfume
Floats with me, half-way,
On this return to the primal,
This borderland of death—
Death—with its granite road,
And sign of skull
With indifferent air for eyes.

DEATH OF SAPPHO

Cecil Kyle

Chill, diamond black Ionian waters
Close over marble limbs.
Circles of water widen, weeping,
Carrying the death song to all of Hellas.
A chill wind flows from the Leucadian cliffs
Shuddering through the grove,
And the nightingales call . . .
And call.

GIRL FROM THE HILL COUNTRY

Cecil Kyle

No soft lines blur
The strong curves of you;
No powder veils the dark berry stain
Of your blush;
No curling iron has touched the straight brown hair,
Glowing darkness confined in braids.
No fixed smile curves your sober young lips,
Nor glistens from the frank stare of your eyes.
What do you know of such things?

The cows must be milked and fed;
The young chickens put in their coops safe from
rodents,
And supper of bread and milk given to clamouring
children.
Then sleep.
The oil of your only lamp, the sun, is burned out.

ENTREATY

Cecil Kyle

What medicine,
O Helios,
What restorative
For a heart, sick, failing of love?

In our youth-tide
We built altars to Eros,
All of braided clover bloom and leaf,
And roses,
And our hopes, frolicsome and uncertain as young
lamb.

Through countless,
Unmarked, scented nights
On full-mooned shores
To shell altars, with violets and cyclamen,
We chaunted her presence, Aphrodite.

Time was the mark and beat
Of wave upon the sand,
Perpetual memory of love's emergence;
Time was green water
Slipping over smooth grey stones,
Quiet as the secret life within
Untouched by wildly beating hearts.
Now chaunt and flower and wave
Are just the same,
Though we are different.

We are wearied of love's rites,
With no high comfort
In our death-touched hearts.

Age-old illusion taints young breath.
We have drunk
Of the bitter herbs of our own forgetfulness,
And now we come
Like little winter insects
From dank, mold converted leaves
And bark of trees,
For a metamorphosis in a stray patch of sun.
Helios,
Shining helmeted,
White hands like sullied snows
Are stretched in alms;
Eyes, purple with night,
Await your cleavage
Of eastern sky from land.

THE GENERATIONS

M. A. Mays

Now that I know the one-way trail,
the cry of newborn in first air;
Now that I know the last breath
silenced
and not a place aside from
straight,
I put my forward-going feet,
one after one,
knowing I follow—
knowing they follow me.

FACTORY TOWN

M. A. Mays

Always the chimney-funneled coal,
no leaves of laurel in the rain;
always the window ledge too public for a bird,

the window pane too private for whole sky:

Never the wind blows down the street
 through elderberry bush;
heavy with furnace fumes it slides
 along the wall
leaving the film of soot.

CATTLE COUNTRY

Ethel Fairfield White

The round, low hills,
Tawny with ripe grass,
Bear comb-like markings—
Paths, closely parallel,
Worn by hooves of grazing stock—
The low hills,
Like bowed heads of idle cow hands
Dozing in the sun.

SUMMER AFTERNOONS

Marcia Masters

Summer afternoons seem longer than they are—
Nothing changes:
The sleepy gate stands open,
And the picnic table wears panes of sunlight
Like forgotten glass;
The garden is arrested in the saddest stage of beauty:
Grass lies pensive under too much sun;
Shade falls too perfectly in its appointed place;
Butterflies make flights of sorrow
Over flowers having no bud that has not bloomed.

Oh, I cannot bear this endless beauty;
I would rather sit upon an autumn hill
Where nothing grows except the dusty grape leaves
And a crooked tree that likes to let the wind go past.

ONLY WAY OUT

Emily Pausch

Our shallows
are not without the quills
that tell of other presences,
shadows, that lean on us like heavy animals.

Between the pain and the painful situation,
our instruments of choosing
point to the couch.

O where is the staircase to sleep
six feet under the floors of the eye?

This house with its mirrors
swallowing its victims,
its corridors of unhealthy flora—
and the only door out is a latch further in.

Because I closed my doors with a sign,
“I shall not go out again,”
because I closed all my doors,
mind’s traffic beat on all its drums
till the roof sprang up like a lid,
and boneless in the uncovered night
I remembered those who rose without feet,
who ran,
who leaned on the wind and did not fall—
And the birds of another color who have
 gone out
and have not returned.
I said, “Surely this moment is a century in
 flower,”
Then might we not lie as a swimmer from
 his accomplished seas
rests in a sun white pool?

Years trample the body threadbare
but the language we are looking for is lost—
a forgotten language.

POSTAGE METER

Hanson Kellogg

The mail holds nothing I might not have sent myself,
Stamped and forgotten, a week ago,
Like a suicide note from a prince in a museum case.

Surprise we lose long before laughter or wonder.
The gift of tomorrow becomes
A rattrap set and baited with gilded hunks of
 possessions,
Not darkness nor dawn, but sawdust—
Still furniture, rust—still steel for the kitchen,
Lint—still cretonne and carpet.

The mail is as dead as the sad profiles the stamps
 wear,
Old as the inns on Christmas cards,
Aged as the films of yesterday's disaster.

Only the bones that open the mail are as old.

CONTRIBUTORS

Two poems by CECIL KYLE from *Variegation* were reprinted last year in the excellent column, "A Week of Verse" in the New York Herald Tribune.

Several poems by MARCIA MASTERS occupy an important place in the Autumn issue of *Voices*.

EMILY PAUSCH'S poems have appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago), *Number* and *The New Statesman* (London).

M. A. MAYS is a member of a pioneer family in Berkeley, California.

ETHEL FAIRFIELD WHITE lives in Seattle, Washington.

Poems by HANSON KELLOGG have appeared in two of the important Poetry Awards anthologies issued by the University of Pennsylvania Press. The anthologies' editor-in-chief is the distinguished ornithologist, Dr. Robert Thomas Moore.

LEAH BODINE DRAKE is the author of *A Hornbook of Witches*.

In Ruth Pitter's book, *The Ermine and Other Poems*, there appears the poem, "Aged Man to Young Mother," which was first printed in the Spring 1949 issue of *Variegation*. Early in 1949 Miss Pitter wrote in a letter, "... I simply sat down and wrote this especially for *Variegation* on a theme I had been saving up." It is a pleasure to report that this quarterly was therefore somewhat instrumental in connection with a work by one of the greatest living poets.

ENJOY THE OTHER EMPHASIS AS WELL

You will find in *Recurrence* that rhyme is more modern than many think. Although *Recurrence* and *Variegation* are probably the only magazines intended to complement each other in terms of writing technique in the history of periodical literature, they do often meet on common ground. For instance, both quarterlies use a considerable quantity of poetry experimental in form and content, though the conventional forms are amply represented in *Recurrence*.

RECURRENCE: A QUARTERLY OF RHYME

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Los Angeles 5, California

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