

V A R I E G A T I O N

A Free Verse Quarterly

April, 1946

*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 I. JACOBY, JR., *Editor and Manager*
WILLIAM HOLT GLENN, JR. · SALLY GLENN, *Associate Editors*

ACROSS THE MOON

Edith E. Hewins

A leafless tree twig-fenced the moon,
Jailed it behind bars.
To free it—see it whole
Above the sparkling home-lights on the hill,
I stood aside.
Just then a moth-sized plane
Flew as to the flame, crossed the red-gold disk,
And shaded into night.
O flyer of the stratosphere,
My moon-high wanderer from earth,
Was it you
Who sketched dark flight across that golden globe?

SEA JOURNEY

Harold Vinal

They, the eternal voyagers, the sea wanderers,
Seek beyond many farewells,
The immutability of heaven.

Upon tide's vast expanse, upon cloudless infinity,
They are content to journey,
Far from the earthly boundaries, the finite beginnings.

Beyond the dark and awful tundras of time,
Some spiritual land is their own at last,
A safe harbor after earth's long malaise.

What heavenly orisons sound in their ears,
What serene bells ring up the blue marges,
What metromone buoys, what tide change.

Spectators no longer in that spurious country, the
earth,
No longer sleepers under the homesick eaves,
They follow the sharks, the quick acrobat dolphins.

Here is the poetry they are seeking, the bright, sad
songs,
The saga and the psalms—
The primeval blue battlements of home.

VULNERABLE

Estelle Chase Samuelson

My dreams
Are kites in the wind,
And I with slackened hold,
Trace their flight
In shining cord-lengths
To the sky ...
Forgetting the dreams
That briefly touched a star—
Lying in ragged streamers
At my feet.

LITTLE TOWN

Marcia Masters

Town, I remember your grape-blue twilights:
How still they were;
How infinite with their sweet small lights
Darting like bird-notes out of the hills.
Sometimes at noon when fields were warm again—
Distance flowed into my hands,
Settled like pale mauve water.

Horizons lay over the grass
Where the lark stood, shapely with song.
Down in the streets were the shops with their colored
 candies,
Woolens and fryers, and clerks with their gingham
 smiles.
Out of the schoolyard sprang the children
Glancing like hail from the walks
When work was done.

Maples and wildflowers
Shaded the village eyes,
Steadied the look of suffering
Wherever a grief had come.

And bells! eternity's voices,
Summoned from silence,
Faded in great loud whispers
Far past the reaches of laughter.

Town, in the midst of tumult,
I think of your bright detachment,
And strangely, am comforted;
In my mind runs your river
Just as it was at sunrise

... Drifting with rested shadows.
The scent of your lilacs rouses
Thoughts I had pushed aside,
And I stand in a field where distance
Brings me its secrets.

I think of you, Town,
Fresh as your wind-clasped grasses;
Always I hear the wind in your poplars,
And the cowbells' faraway laughter;
I see your streets scattered with larks
... And with colored candies.

Town, I remember ...

TRAIN IN THE MIST

Marcia Masters

Fire's pulse, love's wonder,
All the world of spring,
Were on that train
Which, roaring with circumstance,
Hurled darkness from the tracks.
All elements dividing us,
Were blown like spray, flung back
Upon the night.

I stood upon the platform
In the mist,
With priests and nuns,
While rain like tinfoil
Tangled on the tracks,
And headlights turned upon me
Legendary eyes.
Oh, it was marvellous the sights I saw:
The subterranean wealth behind the wind-rocked
Panes of glass—
Silver and velvet,
And the waiters sloped
In dying postures
Over cup and glass.
Faces pressed against the misty windows
Were like rich portraits,
Painted moments that rebuke
The long stale glance of time.

Suddenly the station
Where I stood—
Bloomed ...;
Shimmering with rain and cinders,
As the light bore down,
Turned yellow as a daffodil.

And then the train whistled, whispered,
Shivered, and stopped:
And love, with rainy collar,
Stepped quickly to my side.

Oh, Night!
Which has no season and no end,
Where is that burst of madness
That rushed the heart
Down tightening silver rails?
That train—
Which now I hear
Sorrowing down
 Dark victorious slopes of vanished years?

L I L A C

Marcia Masters

Lilac, I shall come back some spring
When I am dead,
Loving your wild wet magic
Even as now.
Between your flowers and me
Not even Death can intervene,
Can make us strangers.

If but for a moment,
I shall return,
Remembering some spring
Fled like a bird from time.

Even as now, I shall draw near you
Yearning unspeakably,
Though your incredible blossoms
Never again would be mine
... To gather.

RUNAWAY BOY

Joseph Joel Keith

Long, long he lay,
a part of breath beneath.
The ships were in the sky.
The sky was sea.
Adventure led,
 far from the dark old homes
of people,
 shuttered fear,
where old ones hide their greed,
 their hatred,
where hard smugness walks in satin
slippers, where the mind and heart,
 in ragged raiment
 shivers in the cold;
far from the curtained prisons,
far from homes where kinship knocks
and no one says "Come in,"
and silence,
 lying,
sits there in the dark.

PICASSO

Orian DePledge

Somehow truth pricks through the artifice.
The purple, green, and red realities
Are thrust upon the canvases.
He lives upon their angry surfaces
In a strange color-world of wrath,
His dark mood like a slow poison
Courses through the blue—
Each passion poured in angular veined light.

FRUIT OF THIS HOUR

Frona Lane

In the blue-bulb night we share
pastel petals of laughter,
silver speech, lavender love.
Eyes soft as silence, we gaze
through curtains of iris.
The fruit of this hour is lush
and ready for the feast.
The forest of fancy is green
and all the leaves lamps.

SPRING COMES TO THE UPLANDS

Ethel Romig Fuller

To blossomy cymbals of dogwoods,
pink trumpets of wild currant,
faery chimes of twin-flowers,
fiddle fronds of bracken,
Spring dances along the foothills.

Ineffable attars are blown
from swirling pollen gauzes.

As the young rain wind, her laughter.

Listen! A song of ice shackles
tinkling off the wrists
of myriad winter-prisoned waters.

Spring climbs laboriously
to the polar summit
of a sky-leaning pinnacle
barely in time to greet Autumn
breathlessly scrambling up a farther slope.

UNCONQUERED FRAGRANCE

E. MacDermott Johnston

Can nothing blot the scent
where white gardenias
Once have breathed fragrance into love,
A scent-swept love that drifts about my heart,
A love that in fullness
Measures the hunger
Of an unwilling loss.
Only a barren field
Will free me
Of white-velvet perfume.

THE AFTER-LETTER

Irene Bruce

Swift apparition
rattles through a letter-slot,
floating a snow-flake of shock
into the cold room ...
Eyes partake of the wafer of dead thoughts,
and hands open the casket of catastrophe.

TENTACLES

Elinor Lennen

Memory,
Loosen octopus fingers.
Let me go free, one hour,
To search if there be life
Past shores of experience we knew.

If not, take me back
Into the freedom of your fierce captivity.

PROSODY FOR FREE VERSE

Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.

(Continued from January issue)

7. Accent, the very core of prosody, is important in free verse and determines the character of a line by regulating the length of its component feet. By this it is not meant to convey the impression that an accent must occur within each foot. An accent standing outside of a pyrrhic (two weak syllables) makes possible the determination of such a foot, although it does not form a part of it.

8. Wherever there are alternative trends within one line, which are unrelated, (such as dissyllable along with loosening, trisyllable along with tightening, etc.), they are attributed to the wavering category.

9. If there are related alternative trends in a line, the line is more properly attributed to that one which happens to belong to one of the distinct types rather than to its variant.

It is assumed, therefore that when a line hesitates between the two forms of dissyllabism (the dissyllable line itself and its variant, the tightening line), such a verse is more properly considered a dissyllable line.

Example: "Amid the riot of austerities"

Above line as a dissyllable alternative: iamb, iamb, pyrrhic, iamb, pyrrhic (or iamb if the natural impulse to dwell on the last syllable is considered as the equivalent of accent).

Above line as a tightening alternative: iamb, amphibrach, anapest, pyrrhic (or iamb).

Final analysis: The line can be called either dissyllable or tightening, but is more properly ascribed to the distinct

type (the dissyllable line) than to its variant. Therefore, it is analyzed as a dissyllable line in this instance.

10. The same factors hold true in the case involving alternatives within one line of the distinct type or archetype, the trisyllable line, along with its variant, the loosening line. Such verses are more properly labeled trisyllable lines.

11. Lines composed wholly of monosyllabic feet and irreducible quadrisyllabic feet are regarded as intensifications respectively of the natural tight and loose textures of dissyllable and trisyllable lines.

12. A quadrisyllabic foot occurring in lines along with dissyllables and trisyllables is either classed as one expanded trisyllabic foot or two dissyllabic feet. Choriambes and some paeons are frequently irreducible and therefore counted as trisyllables. With the aid of the pyrrhic, such feet as anapestic paeons and dactylic paeons break down naturally into pairs of dissyllables.

13. A verse or line ceases to be a verse or line and approximates the paragraph of prose to a great degree, when it exceeds six feet. A long line ordinarily has diluted stichic qualities. Such verse should be rearranged or poured into the mold of prose. A prose poem is not free verse; it is intensified paragraph. All prose has good or bad potential stichic qualities. Idiomatic speech often possesses excellent stichic qualities.

14. There is quite a body of free verse that employs wavering lines and the variants, tightening and loosening lines, to the exclusion of the archetypes, dissyllable and trisyllable lines. Such *vers libre*, as a class, can be called variant verse or variant free verse. Its disadvantage seems to be that it is hemmed in by negative restrictions, as if it did not dare employ and must carefully avoid certain rhythmic pulses. All other free verse is truly free, in that it

does not seem dominated by the need of consciously excluding rhythms, but rather distributes them, so that interesting contrasts in texture are obtained which conform to the shifts in mood of a poem. Variant free verse, in spite of this limitation, is a splendid medium for the dynamic poet who is bent on producing powerful somber effects.

15. In explaining these terms, I have employed the rigidities of definition, because that is the only way the exposition of a concept can be made. However, all of these terms are to be employed freely in the way that will best reveal the variegated textures of free verse in much the same unhampered way that a critic of painting searches for horizontals and verticals, areas of light and dark, and other contrasting elements that go to make good composition.