

VARIATION

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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W I L L O W S

Marie Erwin Ward

The willows reel
In waves of green,
Now pale, now deeper hued,
Emerald curl of song
Along the margin of the river.

S O L A C E

Lynn Hamilton

Thoughts, like cloudy gulls,
Wheeling, circling, pause on nothingness
Ever to circle and wheel again.

They leave day a light lost among shadows
Spreading down desolate slopes to long ago.

Only in night,
In the chambered seclusion of night,
Is there solace.

THE STORM IS HERE

Edith E. Hewins

A cloud flings its shadow
Like a thin mat across the meadow.
Fast flying its airways,
The jay is shrilling.
Birds break their song.
The barnyard stops its cackle.
Now the four-way winds are huddled,
While trees hold their leaves stiff
And all is still.
Sudden as a panther's leap
The burst of rain!

RHYTHM OF SOUND

Frona Lane

No sound to the slow slide of fingers over wood—
only the sound of lead over words,
each word having a sliding and separate sound,
each thought having a spaced sound.

And then the rain. It came on a wind wave.
I looked and saw the sky turn.
Seaward I saw the sky move, looked and saw the
ground stir.
Seaward I saw the ground move.

And then I heard the sounds — the sliding and
separate sounds ,
the spaced and leaden sounds.
I looked and saw my name there, saw my name in
lead there;
I heard it moving toward the sea.

NO DOOR WOULD OPEN

Muriel Ward

I could cry for the eyes that hold
Only a blank look,
And the lips that form
No altruistic word.
I could weep for the minds that think
Only of last night's date, today's dress,
And tomorrow's kiss.
I could shed tears, too,
For the hearts that are unoccupied.
But the blank eyes would stare at me;
The lips voicing the careless minds
Would ask, "What's the matter with you?"
No door would open in the vacant hearts.

ARYANS IN EXILE

James Y. Revorg

PROLOGUE — 1916

Noon's furious ripeness
Beats down and cracks these walls,
This Mexico, half worn away and bursting
With maturity's excess.
Here in a Oaxaca garden,
All the tropic heat
Gathers at noon,
Yet fails to bring warmth of health
To one poor northern cheek.
Ripening fruit and over-ripened wall
Revolve about her
Ineffectually.
"Come, Willi,"
Her voice calls through the foliage,
"Ven aqui."
The hedge is half of leaves and half of years.
The five-year-old comes running toward the chair,
Where the pale drawn face smiles painfully.
"What is it, mother dear,
What do you want?"
"Take my hand
And hold it tight!
Germany and I are dying!"
The child holds the hand, the cool hand in his own,
A coolness like the chill within the voice,

Filled with the north,
Filled with death's cold promise.
And in her other hand
A flowering twig,
For her a tiny crumpled cloud of bloom,
As within the after-sunset,
The scatterings of the ghost of pink
Float fading through the twilight sky.
So the cool frail voice
Draws from the flower
Something deeper, sweeter than all hope
And drops these words
Into a new, a novice memory,
"Die Welt ist schön!" *

1933—CIUDAD DE MEJICO

Many years have passed
Out of life into remembrance.
Willi is talking with Martita in the square.
"Martita,
Hans does not hate you."
"He hates Mexico!
He hates the Indian blood in me.
You talk of purifying this and that.
You will grow to hate me.
It is either I or these blond friends of yours,

* The world is beautiful
Mexico or Germany,
One or the other!"

"I shall have both!"
"Impossible! By this time you should know it.

And all those meetings;
Don't go tonight."

That night through the small crowded hall
Rings Hans' strong voice.

"'Humble Indian blood!'

I heard it the other day.

Half-breeds and Indians

Should rule the world and us. Ha!

All the bright rushing energies

Should be shoved back

So this sloth might crawl more freely,

Lie amid baked and crumbling walls.

To be Mexican one must

Have crawling through one's veins

'Humble Indian blood.'

Or if not have it,

Marry some dark face

And have children like the twilight

Browning with each generation,

Each flicker in the history of the race.

No! No! No!

Not for us

Such cowardly compliant destinies!

Across the ocean,

At this moment

Our Fuehrer paces back and forth,

Looks with sharp gentle eyes,

Utters crisp words,

Lets fly one moment his expressive hands

In gestures that reject such fates.

Behind that unique forehead

Is a mind whose thoughts are driving thoughts

With the sole aim:
To make us one wherever we may be,
Here or in the Fatherland,
One great sure forceful mass
That carries the world
Forward under its control —
Onward, ever onward.
We here are the isolated fragments of that mass.
We must retain purity of blood,
Winning the lordship over humble destinies,
Giving them all the slavery they need.
There are lives that cry for halters.
Arriving at this high mastery
Requires one thing above all others:
Supreme disdain like some high rock
Letting these waves of gentle darkness
Break against it,
While it stands upright in that kindly human flood,
Upright and apart,
To mold direction on the split pliant streams.
Above all things
Beware the gentleness, seductive gentleness
Of that soft current,
Reject all pity,
Feel your apartness!
Learn cruelty,
All its bright steel lessons!
Enslave,
Give stinging lashes to subservient backs,
Torture,
Endure whatever comes to pass, strike hard
So the German in you
Rules the world!"

Hans drives the great coda of his speech
Into their spirits like some nail.
Martita is swept out of Willi's mind
Like a soft mysterious cloud
By the cold wind of bright electric words.
The room seems to quiver, shake!
Vibrations sharp, yet worshipful,
Whip back from the blond herd,
And Willi, too, drawn by the metallic flash
Of the cold glinting German words,
Is wrenched into a world
Full of quick promise
And excited pulse.
No more of yawning;
Each moment now is struggle,
Fight, the sting of salt spray,
Traversing mysteries,
Alive, alive,
Thrillingly unasleep,
Gulping chill air that threatens storms;
Alive, alive, life is alive
With throbbing consciousness of death!

Suddenly he feels a hand;
Firm is the grip
That swings him round.
Hans speaks,
"Tonight we dine at the Hipódromo
Where Germans serve
Good German food to Germans,
And where our leader's followers
May talk unhindered,

Knowing that all about them
Are only trusted ears and tongues.”

In the Hotel Hipódromo,
Steins upon tables,
And Germans everywhere.
Willi sits at a table
With his new-found bright-haired god.
“What of Martita?
I can’t forget her.”

“But you must!
Concerning these non-Aryans, these half-Indians,
Forget all women
Since none here are pure of blood;
Consecrate your life to Germany.
Last year I was in Europe.
The ship steamed straight past England
To the Mediterranean Sea.
Each night, leaning on the rail I had tremendous
thoughts.
Here are some of them,
Visions through crystal,
Clear views of our country’s glory.
Listen!
One night rose the chalk cliffs of England
Soft and unstonelike as the British soul
That claims such glory and nobility.
These words raced through my mind:
‘Kind hands,
Frightened and relaxing grips,
Loose your world.
We of the firm wrists,
Quick strong fingers,

Shall have or strangle it.'

Then came glimpses of the coast of France:

'France,

Weak land,

Lover of life,

What have we to do with you?

Only this—

You shall learn

The beauty of destruction from our hands.

What could be lovelier

Than the fine-carved death?'

Then off the coast of Italy:

'Land of sweetness,

We shall make a pact with you,

Join hands to split a continent.

Land of grape and citron!

Land of dark skins!

You were always destined for a slave!'

And one night in a storm:

'The huge water reels

Before the wind's advance—

Then the tent-like swelling of the waves.

My lungs absorb the steep precipitate gale;

My mind grows wind-raw with delicious cruelties.

I am prepared

To shower the whole world

With gifts of death.'

And then that clear, clear night

I had my boldest thought:

'The sky adrip with stars,

Each one a pool of rusting blood.

What splendid bomb

Exploded matter through the universe
To make this liquid fiery slaughter called the sky?' "

Willi breathes a word,

"I — "

Hans cuts him off.

"These are my inmost thoughts;

Beauty and terror,

You must learn, are one.

You have not learned half the lessons

Of this bright lonesome cruelty.

This cruelty!

Without it mismanagement runs rife,

And low things rule!

I have been talking Europe.

There's far more to say of this new world,

New world full of what is old;

We'll show it that the newness, youth,

Is confined in us.

You'll go with me to Lake Chapala

Where among mountains

Better than among friends,

You shall learn from me alone."

Only two days remain

Before they leave,

And Martita pleads with him,

"Don't go.

You know what's said of Hans."

"Querida mía,

The Reich's dark enemies spread these rumors.

He is purer than purity itself.

He creates purity as he does strength

With every word he utters."

"I have seen how with his eyes

He tries to hold you.

If you go with him to Lake Chapala,

You must be fortified,

And only I can do it,

Willi, amor mio."

LAGO DE CHAPALA

At nightfall by the lake

Willi lurches out, stunned,

Down to the shore,

His wrist free from Hans' grip,

His own eye free from the lascivious blue eye,

Pursued by a swift rush of evil German words.

Now he understands.

Remake the world and learn from Hans!

Forget Martita!

This is that newness,

Vitality incarnate!

The whole world is perverse and hateful!

World! World! World! World!

The word turns over in Willi's mind.

Then suddenly,

He hears a dear voice say,

"Die Welt ist schön."

The pier extends

Over the waters,

The slow wind's shifting of them almost whisperless,

Only the quiet spread

Of liquid surface

Into the vague dark.
An Indian woman with a child
Upon the pier,
Her slow step and the lake
Smoothing the surge within him,
Ending all exile and all pain!
"Humble Indian blood!"
His mother's blond head as dear as it is lost in time,
And this, the new world's blood,
Indistinguishable!
One!
The same!
And Martita
All darkness and all light,
Mestiza.
No more of the ingenious hatreds,
All of the beauty of the earth still his,
All lakes, all seas, all speech!
His mother's love,
Humanity,
The new world and the old,
Martita
His!
His without seizure,
The whole earth, Mexico.