

# 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.*

## CONTENTS

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|                                                                                                     |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <i>Furrowed Light.</i> Daniel Smythe . . . . .                                                      | 5  |
| <i>Dresden Tragedy.</i> Virgie Bernhardt . . . . .                                                  | 6  |
| <i>Love is not Lost.</i> Virgie Bernhardt . . . . .                                                 | 8  |
| <i>Your Soul.</i> Charles Wharton Stork . . . . .                                                   | 9  |
| <i>Sea Shell.</i> Irene Bruce . . . . .                                                             | 10 |
| <i>The Evicted.</i> Dorothy P. Salsig . . . . .                                                     | 11 |
| <i>Dark Rumor.</i> Dorothy Humes . . . . .                                                          | 12 |
| <i>Interrogation.</i> Florence Stevenson . . . . .                                                  | 13 |
| <i>Build Walls of Noise.</i> Gertrude Fletcher . . . . .                                            | 14 |
| <i>Dune Country Night.</i> Ethel Fairfield White . . . . .                                          | 15 |
| <i>Tides.</i> Elizabeth Cooper . . . . .                                                            | 16 |
| <i>Santa Ana.</i> Hannah Smith . . . . .                                                            | 17 |
| <i>To Fair Perplexity and Lake Elsewhere.</i> Grover I. Jacoby,<br>Jr. . . . .                      | 18 |
| <i>To the New Telephone Building and Distant Noises at<br/>Night.</i> Grover I. Jacoby, Jr. . . . . | 19 |
| <i>The Nihilist's Complaint.</i> Grover I. Jacoby, Jr. . . . .                                      | 20 |

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## FURROWED LIGHT

*Daniel Smythe*

---

The sky is plowed by the mountains,  
And the furrowed light is spreading.  
The aprons of the steep slopes  
Spill the forests like a green flood,  
And they are guiding the swift winds  
And the valley-pointed rains that come down  
Upon the houses and the faces of the people.

## DRESDEN TRAGEDY

*Virgie Bernhardt*

---

Once in a high and marble room  
Where quiet watched us through the walls,  
As if dignity might tap a shoulder  
To mind a squeaking shoe, a loosened thread,  
Yet no one saw a thread or heard a shoe.  
Each moved deftly past the others,  
Liquidly, like fish in opaque water —

Once you were there with me,  
You were a tiny thing beneath your dark-blue coat,  
Behind your long lashes;  
And quiet and marble  
Tensed your small hands.  
You were still and solemn; silence  
Made your eyes large and your  
Lashes darker; and the marble walls  
Were white cosmetics on your face;  
Your dark-blue coat was longer;  
And your brown braids were browner;  
You were older on this day.  
I had never seen a green shoot  
Grow an inch within an hour.

In a lighted alcove, behind glass,  
You watched a man who placed some china dolls,  
Blue, small-featured, Dresden,  
Grouped on a swish of silk.  
You swallowed in your throat and smiled,

Quickly and to yourself and with bright  
    recognition,  
As to a welcomed playmate suddenly seen.  
Your fingers itched with wanting.  
You spoke, and then were startled  
At the shower of the sound down upon you.  
You did not feel me there till then.  
Your fingers tightened on my hand.

Then a doll slipped  
And fell through the man's fingers.  
Your cry was deep and sudden  
As if the doll had cried it.  
Broken pieces in your fingers,  
In your pillow, through your future,  
Your cry was sharp with broken pieces.

With your tear-wet face against me,  
I took you far, heavy with sobbing,  
To the cool and prickling grass;  
And the earth rocked from your sorrow.  
I stayed with you long,  
Long, before the grasses  
Could with their constant curling, curling,  
Comfort a small child,  
Stroking her fingers with caressing blades,  
Stroking her small fingers.

## LOVE IS NOT LOST

*Virgie Bernhardt*

---

Love is never lost; the calla lily  
Has the bee in mind when she  
Makes with her madness,  
Her deep jungle yellow yellow;  
When buckwheat wears lace  
And ruby-throated hummingbird  
Vibrates flitter-flitter wing-songs  
To the sweet flower,  
Love is not lost. Across the world  
It is so; the bower bird  
Steps out a love dance in his jeweled arbor;  
He has built his dedication with his beak.

Sometimes I hear it in a song.  
When love has no harbor, it might come up  
anywhere  
And cry to be fulfilled —  
The heightened smile,  
Tears for a hungry child,  
The way I kiss you sometimes in the evening.  
Love is not lost and does not tarnish;  
Broken, mislaid, reincarnate.

## YOUR SOUL

*Charles Wharton Stork*

---

The deepening violet after sunset,  
Where I can feel the urgency  
Of silver points  
Impatient to prick through.



## SEA SHELL

*Irene Bruce*

---

Here in the secret ear of echo  
Near the green realm of endless else  
Roars the reflected all,  
Where the inner out enters  
A spiral of orange pearl,  
And sound bears the round cell of the self,  
Singing,  
Curving,  
Singing.

## THE EVICTED

*Dorothy P. Salsig*

---

Once again  
the difficult tears of maturity  
blind my eyes.  
I must move on.  
I must leave the familiar smooth paths  
that courage and patience  
have worn to ease of use.  
I must move on  
to jungles of strange faces,  
to unknown roughness for the feet,  
to shut-door loneliness of heart.  
I must leave my home,  
I must move on.

## DARK RUMOR

*Dorothy Humes*

---

What is this rumor  
hoarse-whispered by the wind,  
this universal gossip  
among sardonic, winking constellations?

Does it concern the furtive moon  
sidling from cloud to cloud?

Or mutter  
at the course a headlong comet streaks  
through space?

Or is it the disclosure  
from one scarred, smoldering planet  
of plotting that portends  
annihilation!

## INTERROGATION

*Florence Stevenson*

---

How can I think of you?  
You have stolen my mind  
And placed an autumn maple leaf  
Within my brain—  
Which crackles like thoughts,  
But produces nothing.

Does my mind feel heavy  
In your hands?  
Or do you fold it neatly  
Into your breast pocket  
With my heart?

## BUILD WALLS OF NOISE

*Gertrude Fletcher*

---

Noise — this is the age of noise . . .  
This is its day, and a million alarm clocks begin it.  
    Snap on the radio,  
        Give it the works;  
            Push it up to the limit.  
    Louder — louder,  
        Bathe by it — shave by it —  
            Have it for breakfast;  
            Have it all day — all day.  
    Go to bed with it — fall asleep to it,  
    Leaving it vocal — going on blaring;  
        Ready for any awakening,  
Keep one jump ahead of silence.

## DUNE COUNTRY NIGHT

*Ethel Fairfield White*

---

Always the harsh rustle of tall dune grass,  
And the weed-pod castanets;  
Always the swish of wave tongues licking the sand ...  
Restless, the dune spirit searches vainly for peace.

Midnight darkness hides prowling furry creatures,  
But cannot muffle the scurrying of their small feet,  
Nor the flap of low-flying bony wings like romping  
skeletons,  
The faint, quavering call of nightbirds, and one  
sharp cry.

Mystery rules here and silence never intrudes.

## TIDES

*Elizabeth Cooper*

## Impulse coalescing

swelling

crashing

on the thin, well-swept sand.

Here and there

a wave is flattened

in the clash with bonfire and song.

Mostly

its churning fills the dark.

So as the tides, these nights.

Not nothing —

night is kinesthetic

motion flowing through leaves,

brimming the streets,

weaving in windows open to the hint of a breeze.

This sinuous force is plated with sound,

discordant complaints of desire,

jazz,

O be still and let me savor the night.

SANTA ANA

*Hannah Smith*

---

The wind is a whirling Amazon,  
Dancing  
With looping veils of sand.

The trees are a Greek chorus  
Bowing in deep obeisance  
In the yellow spotlight  
Of the dust-dimmed sun.

The doors and windows of my little house  
Clatter unwilling applause.



TO FAIR PERPLEXITY AND  
LAKE ELSEWHERE

*Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.*

---

This tree is full of contradictions,  
Little attempts at wind.  
Its tentative leaf  
Is indecision's portrait.  
Come, stand before it,  
Match bewilderments.

Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.

LAKE ELSEWHERE

Not quite a wind,  
The continuous shift of air  
Athwart the lake,  
Evokes  
The multiple smile of water.

You too, my dear,  
Pluck gaiety out of the air,  
A carefree loveliness.

TO THE NEW TELEPHONE  
BUILDING AND DISTANT  
NOISES AT NIGHT

*Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.*

---

*(Chorus to be intoned by employees and stockholders)*

Large block of concrete!  
Sunset obstruction!  
Magnificent boor!

Of telephonic communications  
You are the center, huge structure,  
The heart.

Go on squatting at sunset  
In the midst of the various flame,  
Interrupt boldly  
With your rectangular mass and your bells,  
Fill the air with good-bye and hello,  
Crash the sacred horizon at dawn and twilight.  
Deliver your impact.

Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.

DISTANT NOISES AT NIGHT

Vague fountain of lost precisions,  
Composing and decomposing  
In descents of auditory spray!

## THE NIHILIST'S PLAINT

*Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.*

---

Attention!

All you affirmers!

Here where leaves cut the sky,  
Converting the vastness to flecks,  
I catch my breath.

I am suffused with delight  
By the blue tatters,  
The green lacerations.

There must be some need for negation.  
There must be!  
There must be!