

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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SUMMER'S END

Marcia Masters Jennings

It will be in autumn—
When the lake that I loved
Burns blue,
And the beach is cleared
Of summer's dream;
On the dunes where the hemlock broods,
All footprints will be effaced;
No lovers will lie
On the cold breasts of sand.
It will be in autumn—
If I go home again.

What grief can the heart find then
Which it cannot accept?
No more will there be
The sad little flutter of insects
Rising like souls
From the summer dust,
Nor white arms by moonlight
Curving with love.

I shall go home—
If at all,
Past a brown field,
Up a stern road where the leaves
Lock in the ruts with the secrets of frost.

FOG AT NIGHT

Frank Bernard

Far edge of San Francisco,
Soft lapping of Pacific Ocean
At the back door steps . . .

The fog is a woman of not-too-careful manner
Out late in the wet dark,
In her lace gown, faintly smudged,
Cupped in the wind,
Swirling
Garment of mermaid strayed from deep sea.

Time from first dark to deep black
When street lamp floats in iridescent mist,
I slip out,
Develop an intimate, finger-tip acquaintance
With the personal, caressing, nocturnal visitant.

NIGHT STORM

Frank Bernard

Hear the wind under the door,
Slipping a soft tendril
Through the crack where a light shines.

The night is dark—an abyss of black without stars;
The moon has dipped itself in the cloudy mist.
Murk of night storm coming!
Hear the muted step in the far part of the sky,
The distant approaching thunder.

I know that you are awake at this hour—
That you have slipped from the bed with its cool
 sheets,
Its pure, cool whiteness of lovely, soft, enfolding
 sleep,
Have slipped out in the dark and are about your
 secret
To-be-forgotten purposes.

I do not ask what you do—or where you go.
Some tender certitude I keep that the moon is bright.

EMPORIUM

Frank Bernard

In the other world atmosphere
Of the escalator,
Rising and falling,
Seeming or dreaming
With the slow-motion camera,
I may see you on the lower floor,
Hesitating at the counter with bright flimsy scarves.
Never a word slips out—
Not “Stop,” nor “Wait!
Let’s talk a minute.”

Suspended in an unlived-in level of space,
The unexplored gulf assumed to be uninhabited,
I observe agitated shoppers above and below,
Incessant, impersonal,
Flowing in and out of aisles
With intricate purpose.

So it appears
Tranquil in a world of between-floors
And on a sliding stair.

IN NOVEMBER

Marietta Thompson Sprague

Husks,
Ghosts of summer's bounty!
Gone past time-reckoning,
Their young shootings,
Their proud maturity—
Tasselled tops and full fruitage;
Gone with the small scamperings at their feet,
The faint sounds of germination and growing,
The trickle of rain furrowing to thirsty root!

In the strong breeze,
Their dry forms crackle like stiff silk.

When the wind drops,
A touch of rime roughens their straked
quivering.

Husks,
All too ready for the cutting!

OUT OF MORNING STILLNESS

Fanny Montague Hunt

Noises accrue, blend, quiver . . .

From the distant street car clang
To muffled machine,
The day's work begins
Its eight-hour singsong.

Noises accrue, blend, quiver . . .

THERMOMETER

Lucille Evans

Flowing in the tube of years,
life is quicksilver.
The silver fluid runs
up and down:
delirium, collapse, destruction!

When will the moving thread rest
on the numeral of peace?

PSYCHOPHOBIA—TWO STUDIES

Lionel Monteith

TRAIN-TUNNEL

Rolling,
rolling over the brim,
the dark hills come, roaring on,
cracking in the brain and
sweeping aside the green fields'
laughing flowers,
bursting like the tide
upon some battle shore
to cast its flotsam dread
into the hands of the living.

He descended into hell . . .
(the seven stations from Kings' Cross*
are each a nail) . . .
O God be with me now—

But see! the waves have broken:
dark hills slide again into
the freedom of sunlight
and I am alone, knowing
my own victory.

*(King's Cross—one of London's principal railway stations.)

DARK SUN

Low now, this morning's sun hung
round-rimmed and yellow mirror
to the unrising mind,
and in the green-walled daylight
every leaf was barbed.
Thus I knew
some thought aberred—
not fitting the pattern
of the twirling morning mind.
But neither sound
nor sign came;
from the hung sun (low there)
only, I knew the darkness
inside.

And in the gloom
of the morning sun
the foam of blackness
called me
down into its depths.

And in the gloom
of the morning sun
there was no beauty:
there was one sin
only.

FIST OF THE STORM

Joseph Joel Keith

The fist of the storm
lands,
then moves in and out
and in, with increasing fury
pounds at the house.
The door protests,
the shutter flaps and the hinge
whines.

Only the window
like a thin, complacent face
of a lady
sure of herself,
faces the robust
and masculine threat—

whole and unmarred and unshaken
in the flashes of the storm's anger.

LADY IN PINK

Joseph Joel Keith

As the hawthorn,
pink and radiant,
she waited—
beneath her loveliness
a vicious thorn of words,
beneath her flowering
a piercing needle of language.

If the one who had known her
only in softness,
approached her,
darkly
she prepared,
with her hidden weapons,
to prick swiftly
the gentle pulse of her lover.

DARK INTUITION

Joseph Joel Keith

Do not fear
the dark cave
of silence.
There is no sound
now.

Approach now.
Enter.

Nothing is there.

What is there is what
is believed
outside
in the blinding light.

WOODS IN MOONLIGHT

Daniel Smythe

Over the tall brow of the hill
the dark side of the trees extends
like an uneven and jagged blade.
The moonbeams glance off the toothed points.

RAPE OF NYMPHAEA

Frona Lane

Sky assaults pond.
Water is no longer still.
Pond with wind
attacks lilies.

Morning retires:
sky to noon.
Pond without lilies
meets deferred sun
quietly.

RETURN OF THE EGRET

Edith E. Hewins

Our egret is here.
This is his lake, and he has returned
To light us with the taper
of his long standing.

RAINBOW BIRTH

E. MacDermott Johnston

Stubbornly the clouds clung close to earth,
The black and blue-black
Deep within them,
Till wind and light struck through—
Shattering the vague accumulation
To aqueous clarities
And stringing the rainbow
With the dripping crystals.

LOS ANGELES DUSK

Helen Curry

Now when city hills draw close,
dusk-brown,
and the swift rise of the full moon
makes the sky fluent,
there is a silent breath for remembering
time when such moon-motion
summed up love . . .

And I taste the wild-oat breath of summer
fresh in my mouth,
the thick odor-dark,
and the blown rose.