

V A R I E G A T I O N

A Free Verse Quarterly

Volume III · Spring 1948 · Number 2

*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 Co., Room 549, 124 West 4th Street,
Los Angeles 13, California. Subscription is \$1.00 a year, single
copies 35c.

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EDGE OF DOOM

Margaret J. E. Brown

Panic enough for all!
We have broken the code
That is the silence of the unknown;
And now we know.
We have seen the sun near
And have rocked above the thunder;
We have heard the explosion of doom.
And we have made a monument of the annealed
quartz bowl
Set in the sand of Alamogordo.

Five years for the bomb to grow anew in the enemy's
laboratories!
Five years for the bomb to grow in his heart!

The earth has been a pleasant home
From Eden down:
The mountains round about Jerusalem . . .
Athens, the violet-crowned . . .
The wine-dark sea . . .
This precious stone set in the silver sea . . .

Now that for several million years
The globe has been cool and habitable,
And the great upheavals which tipped the mountains
on their sides
And raised the floor of the sea high,
Over and over,

Have slackened,
And since we have found no better place to live,
Where valleys flow with any more milk and honey
Or where the seasons are more exciting,
And have not yet learned
All God meant when He made it,
Would we be very wise
To make our own day of wrath,
To make the heavens
Roll together like a scroll
And the earth consume with fire?

We are not big enough for our toy.
Ask the men who made it;
They are afraid.
They have put the reins of the sun
Into the hands of a boy.

It would be beautiful to die like Greece
And be remembered with honor
By the heirs.
But to drop from sight like Atlantis
And to leave only a whiff of story
That later men will call fantasy!

How do men come through fear,
Come through and live?

We are back in the old cave,
With terror all about.
We are the child afraid of the dark,
Who smells the bear's breath on his neck
And tastes corroded metal on his tongue.

We can not run a little way out of danger
Into the lighted room:
The cave is large, and dark, and full of fear,
And where is courage?

We have come round the circle of all time.
If the plane slope any way but up,
We pass the invisible point,
Are back at our beginning
On a bare planet
Kind to protozoa, not to men.
We are the enemy,
The maker of the hot wind
To blow us all into the past.

No need for museums then,
Nor any records of old time,
Nor wisdom on the road ahead.
We shall go back
Beyond the comfortable cave and terror;
We shall need the courage of the cell,
The protozoan,
The will to live through million transformations,
The courage of the cell only,
The protoplasm.

If the plane slope any way but up . . .

THE TELEPHONE

Lawrence P. Spingarn

The telephone informs me
How breathless she is,
Having run upstairs in a high house
To answer it,
And I contend:
“She expects my call,
Grows breathless at remembering me.”

Calm sister at the switchboard, think,
When you connect us,
How it was.
Think, but do not interfere,
Perpetual maiden with the copper heart,
The rubber flesh,
And the glass hands nailed on poles.

WAITING

Irene Bruce

The muteness of waiting
magnifies all sound into your approaching
footstep,
only to blot it with lethargy
when you do not come . . .
Any shadow
is a monotone outlining your figure,
and one extended moment leans
into eternity.

VIRGINIA CITY, NEVADA

Irene Bruce

The golden glamour of tourists
glitters into this sudden village,
finding dregs of history scattered obscurely
over the rim of a high mountain canyon.
The travelers shiver when the sun stares at them
bleakly,
and the tip of the wind catches their garments.

The images here are seldom seen
through pity-taunting eyes of tourists,
for while they dip lightly into quarter history,
jerking at handles of coin-famished machines,
the embers of dust are stirring
the deeds of men whose deaths
laugh at their modern gestures.

FRONT-GATE LULLABY

Derek Stanford

I have seen housewives,
neighborly at twilight,
over their front-garden fences
talking;
“My child sleepeth.”
—“And mine crieth.”
—“Ah well, bed now;
We’ve had a fine long day.”

And I have thought
how the cavalcade of colour,
the sunset flaring brightly
as lit petrol,
illuminates awhile
these placid bipeds,
and glorifies
their inarticulate lives.

THE DUSTMEN

Margaret Crosland

Cities dissolve in stars,
in whirlpools tossed with silver,
with faces twisted in iron,
with eyes gouged and glaring—
eyes that have watched for centuries
out of starvation and horror.
The stars rise and set;
their motion swarms about us
like the crowd-voices
always at our window.

The green candles are snuffed,
and the elegant mirrors' reflection
battered into the void.

Down the desolate roads,
past the gat-toothed houses,
the flick of velvet and silk
by the rusty gate,
armies of dustmen come,
sweep up stiffly the flowers,
crumple them up in our good intentions,
thinking of tomorrow's fire.

SOCIAL GATHERING

Helen Curry

Fabric encloses much;
man is made whole,
set apart in wrappings.

Here is apparel;
fold us in casual aloofness;
make our transgressions individual.

THE TWO VOICES

Frona Lane

Now in this place at this time
all people are my people.

Look,
look among grasses concealing accusations
along the most private path of serpents,
come,
pity the bloom-gone unpetaled promise.

Now in this place at this time
all times are mine.
All people are my people.
Even he is mine privately
with the bridge of gold gulls
in San Francisco
or Brooklyn . . .

CAUTIOUS

Elinor Lennen

Mouse-like, I nibbled the cheese, success,
Warily, lest it bait failure's trap.

Beguiling odor, paralyzing fear!

Is there no cheese but in traps,
No pleasant alternative
For tedious roots and grains?

ADVICE DISPUTED

Elinor Lennen

They warn me,
“Jettison your heart;
Discard its futile hoarding.”

But where shall I begin?
Cast to oblivion
Youth’s long cherishing,
Maturity’s desperate clutching of late joy?

What ballast would steady my ship,
With memories gone?

F R E E D O M

John Bayliss

Freedom is not
The wind in the night.
It is the death in the dark
For the right reason.

GEOMETRIC SURVIVAL

Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.

The derangement of horizon
Preceded architecture.
Mountains engaged in it,
And storms at sea
Made loud rumpling attempts.

Now man with his granite scribble
Alters the figure of vacancy.
But somewhere reposes the lurking magnitude—
Surviving earth's convulsions,
The nervous skyline of cities.