

VARIATION

A Free Verse Quarterly

Volume IV · Winter 1949 · Number 1

*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. 25c a copy, \$1.00 a year.

GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

SIDEWALK FLOWER VENDER

Gertrude May Lutz

(SAN FRANCISCO)

Upon his stand
seasons are held in cannisters,
and he, shadowed by thin sun,
by fog-chill,
is part of them.

His slow hands,
brown and weather-bent, outline
each leaf,
each bud;
petals rainbow his eyes.

Around him
sidewalk-sound clatters under quick feet,
but he is remembering furrowed loam,
green, weedless acres . . .

Pause, traveler.
Buy the warm colors:
symbols of dream.

THE FLAGS ARE OUT

John Atkins

They've got the flags out, every colour
known to the eye or the scientific instrument;
the golds of the Middle Age,
the wet greens, the shouting yellows
and the political reds. All the streets
are dammed with colours, throats are choked,
ears stopped, eyes blinded, tongues chained,
by the universal battle cry of loudspeaker colours.
Some are running, running into each other,
turning reds gold, blues green and whites grey,
smudging their rival pinafores, spoiling
the tailored uniform with lies and threats,
every threat and every lie somebody's truth,
somebody's creed, somebody's pamphlet heart.
Nicotine will do, a medal for the finger,
or ambergris, or the chimney's soft award—
somebody's badge, somebody's One-and-Only Word
from God.

The flags are out and everybody's shouting.
Someone will win, somebody's got to win.
It would be a waste of time and colour if nobody won.

POLICY

John Atkins

This swarm of minxes, managers,
manipulators of the social chorus,
may threaten us, disturb us
with their precious cold tongues
and their naked cancer dreams;
thread our veins through their worn symbols
of negligence and carrion carelessness;
or tempt the tired horizon with their songs,
the brittle taste of brine from their smarting eyes.

But if they threaten, cajole, grin or lucubrate
upon the garlic vine, the apple seed;
or if they pin our shirts to mocking limbs
and throw their dice for brilliant carnivals;
we can laugh back, or fill the sack
with anger from the uplands, treason plans,
and garlands of dead roses.

THE DRY SOUL

John Atkins

My friend said to me, "It is the dry soul.
That struggles from a cracked soil,
Drinking avidly our own rancid drops
Of perspiration, the only gift we know;
Nothing more fertile, nothing to intensify
The heart's green or the blood's red flood;
Only a particle of dust on a parched tongue,
A heat wave in a desert's bourne,
Or a pebbly river bed that no more knows
The kind caress of water's energetic flow.

"There should be a thick joy, like a berry
Bursting with Spring, ripe juice urged
Through the broken skin and yellow stars
Cavorting through the melee of a proud disorder.
Whether it be meadows, fine boys fighting,
Loud misery prancing through the bars,
Or the seas enticing spirits from the cave,
This same honey culture, this thing of bees
And ants and fierce-eyed cats—why have we lost
Our trembling song, trembling with love
And a thousand illegal actions under the moon?"

BROKEN CITY

Margaret Crosland

Never to reach the final utterance
after the stumbling on the broken wall;
the struggle among the question-hands
and the lost unspeaking faces.

To wander between the brick and iron
or squint through the loophole to life
in the broken city. No words found
to frame our barren argument.
Fret of wind in the brown trees
and each corner a dusty mouth;
the road blocked by silence,
or the rain nagging at the doorway.

No repleteness of summer came
to a city of shattered windows
and darkened streets, for even the stars
could see we had no penitence.

TO MORNING

Desmond Stewart

the winding horn
breaks the fragile of the morning
stroking the responsive valleys
of the choked flowers
and the Assyrian rose
uncurls its petals
to the gentle goat-hoof

beneath the arbuté leaves
flicker the lids of the world
and through the pliant tendrils
curl like a hand
the faint wind of the uplands
and the salt of the sea
and the thyme scent from the marshes

and from the suave chorale
of the odorous night
the strident cry of the morning
and the flickering fires
leap into pink flame
and over the ridge of the map
the bird soars
and the discarded pleasures
are in renewed virility
the dip of the thigh in water
and the sound of descending streams
and the coral of the lips

and the dark eyes
and the dipping in water

wake then to the world we will create
it lies like an easel before us
take up the brushes to create
and the luxuriance of life
is the box of colours spilt
by an irresponsible god
where there is but one law . . . freedom

THE TIDAL SHOUT

Joseph Joel Keith

The tidal shout,
cry of a crazed king,
is heard
over land,
over water;
his great green hands
move ships from their course,
make ships of houses,
as the ruler reinvades
his plundered province.

CONVOLUTION

Gil Stanley

Wherever there is concrete
or structural steel,
you will find gaunt men
bent into curves,
twisted into undulating coils
about the cold metal
and inflexible stone.

A VOLCANO LOOKS AT WAR

Dale Hart

The volcano
Looks down with unconcern
Upon this beach where white men are.

The algaroba trees listen to alien speech
Of pale warriors from across the sea,
And leather-shod feet crush the wild yam vines
Which grow thickly near the water's edge.
Roaring birds swoop low
And frighten the killdeer's island cousin,
And a seashell held earward
Has no voice for the esthetic drum.
Outriggers are to be seen no more
Upon the metallic waters beyond
Those coral reefs,
And the fishermen have become gardeners,
Forgetting their nets.

Tomorrow, I shall climb the volcano's peak
And look down upon this place with lava eyes.

Perhaps I can see then
What I think the volcano sees now!

AT THE TRAFFIC SIGNAL

Dale Hart

This fellow, dapper even under the sick street lamp—
Presently he will speak of love.
His pause is momentary;
He waits for traffic
And thinks of her—
Whoever she may be.
Likely she lives on the west side.

Man, hurry now,
For you must see her tonight—
And kiss her for me, will you?

MY SACRED MOUNTAIN

Richard Wirtz Emerson

It is many centuries
since I first noticed
that my sacred mountain
had lost its trees and was
dry and sleepless,
and was only beautiful
when the moon
stole my sleep.

DARK THUNDER

Richard Wirtz Emerson

After strings are silent,
I remember the small hand
that was their nervous lover,
and while I am asleep,
I still hear
dark thunder in my house,
until it is time
to bring water from the well.

HUNGRY WAS THE DARKNESS

Eleeza Hadian

The dusk
Poured over the shoulder of the mountain
Like the onrush of black caterpillars
Crawling across my landscape,
And nibbled at the leaves
Of orange and apricot trees.

And the belly of the darkness
Swelled with the rotundity of satisfaction,
As the night
Ate into the core of my earth,
Until not one tree was left standing
To mark a silhouette for hope's uplift.

THE QUIET HOUR

Eleeza Hadian

Driftwood lay along the shores,
Rejected,
Unwanted.

Sea-drenched and dark-heavy,
At the far edge of sky
A cloud
Hung on the last bar of crimson light.

The sun, with gold-laden haste,
Dropped into the pit
Of time, to mold another day—

And driftwood lay about the sands
Waiting the whims of chance!