

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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GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

THE ROOM

Marcia Masters

These paintings which remember places,
Which are memory in color,
Will live through history better than we,
Who will leave not even a shadow on water,
Who have not time
To listen to morning
. Trilling from the softly shaken bough,
Nor to study crystal shimmering at nothing
On the edge of the polished table.

We are living through history,
And haste locks our senses,
Though the paintings hang
Indicting us with their beauty,
And the sunlight falls like discarded flowers
On the stricken floor.

GRIEF

Cecil Kyle

Of lighter substance than sunlight
Over winter snow
Is the context of spirit.
Yet I think grief must have weight,
So slowly move those who bear it;
So strained and different, the smile
Drawn to their faces,
As a passing light
Thrown on desolate houses.

HALOS

Candace T. Stevenson

Painters saw halos—
the gold circlet,
symbol of saints,
symbol of light in faces,
the electric spark
turned by thought.
But I with my own eyes
have seen halos on saints
and on one man
the sinister, lightless
halo of evil.

Candace T. Stevenson

INVITATION

Peter M. Urquhart

Your hard glance
Promises me the bright, aluminum cities
Where weather has been abolished;
The taut technique of the tendoned limb
Efficient, impersonal, austere—
The gleam of a narrow perfection.

I shall come. Oh, I shall come:
But, remember, I also bring
An intolerant landscape of my own—
An ancient, crumbling wall
Seamed with the subtle tones of time,
And a lonely cypress,
Dark with pain,
On a brown hill.

THE VIOLATED

Peter M. Urquhart

We remember little enough—
The acrid intonation of the flames
Talking our village to embers,
The ash and lassitude of grief
In the backwash of the armies.

We could rebuild our homes, we knew,
But our childhood years had no walls
And there is no mortar for broken laughter.
Our dead we gave to the earth;
They lie there, beyond us, in their silence.

Only fragments remain,
Flapping the mind like tattered posters
Or edicts authority left behind,
Schedules of fear in our own language.

We have no more.
We have no explanations here;
For those you must take your purpose
To some victorious city, where
Massed legions of words lie dead, in rows,
On unturned pages.

CROSSING THE FORTH BRIDGE

Desmond Stewart

(To CARLOS)

To us, invisible the iron rainbows,
The deepsunk bastions;
To us, out of mind the wily builders,
Since to be dead is to be forgotten.
For us, but the rattle and the sour upholstery,
The yawning mother under the cheap mauve hat,
The dribbling child writing on the window,
And the young Glasgow gentleman
Reading what is behind the lecherous cover.
For us the bridge is no more visible
Than the power of God around the camels
That carried Muhammad from Mecca,
Through the red, uninteresting desert,
Through the black spears to welcoming Medina.

LONGING FOR NIGHT EXPERIENCED IN BAGDAD

Desmond Stewart

About noon we grow tired of day.
The large red flowers by the public fountain
Wilt as ballerinas dead
Before we were children.
The cyclists coming from their offices
Pedal monotonous wheels
And the taxis howl.
About noon we long for night.
Then the. portico to the ugly store
Is a guilty porch in Alexandria,
And the surrounding night
Is a sea, an immense sea,
To Colchis and perilous islands and strange feats.
The stars of night refute monotony.

OASIS REMEMBERED

Elinor Lennen

Rescued from self an instant,
Restored,
I front the desert of days.

Mirror sand, wind lash, heat sting
Multiplying light-probe:
I dare them all
Remembering the oasis of your empathy,
Gentle and strict at once.

I go, different,
Yet more the one I was—
Rescued from self,
Given to self again.

SOUNDINGS

Elinor Lennen

Lost in the middle of my life
With none who will say, "Poor dear";
Far from childhood's shore,

Not in sight of age's quiet sands
Where slower currents
Might speak comfort after stress,
But here in mid-swirl,
Not bound to that which was or shall be.

Freedom is a lonelier thing
Than the definitions tell.

TOWARD SHORES OF LIGHT

Lucille Evans

Archetype of slow-paced motion,
the black tortoise inches
toward shores of light.
Behind him the grey territory
of unremembered dream,
before him the unwalled prison of sea,
the inevitability
of doom.

BROWN STICKS

Rose Rosberg

When I see the ends of brown sticks,
dry and dead as old men,
when I see the cracked wood
tipping delicate green with pointed buds,
like old men become children again,

as the pointed sheaths, like speartips,
break through my armor of doubt,
break through the mind's winter skies
to let in the color of Easter,
I begin to believe in Swedenborg's angels.

ADVENTURE

Florence Kerr Brownell

What if the sea rose across the dunes, the
 salt grasses;
Would it spill shallow over the earth
As the earth drank it down
To mere snow-thaw ...

And if you freed the hermit-bird in your
 mind,
Would the song waver against light
Shrilling to silence
In empty space?

SENTINEL

Florence Kerr Brownell

A living pine tree stands
When all is over:
The highest bidder cannot cut it down.
How hard the gavel strikes,
And then how fast
The rosewood chair with petit point is gone . . .
An oval mirror, the old familiar clock
Go for the price of one.
But, as the sun sinks lower,
Needles of pine
Glisten new hope.

ORIENTAL BIRD IN A
WESTERN GARDEN

Elma Dean

What memory of net and cage
and the caught wings
drives him to cover?
Escape and hunger—
terror of hawk and cat
have not stilled the temple bells,
the fall of fountains
in the white throat.

Alone, alone among many,
he takes of the given food,
the strange food, delicately;
high in an alien tree
sends the clear call toward China.

CONVALESCENCE

Helen Frith Stickney

Pause quietly beside the stream,
knowing the cleavage
of spirit and flesh;
the air is cold,
and in your ears
there is the rush of strange waters.

Wonder hangs like gauze
over this landscape
of your returning—
you have travelled far,
far as the curve
of the distant horizon,
although you did not leave
this room.

EDITORIAL

Grover Jacoby

THE RESURRECTION OF A TERM

Two decades ago Mr. T. S. Eliot declared that his vers libre like that of Jules Laforgue was free verse “in much the way that the later verse of Shakespeare, Webster, Tourneur, is free verse,” and that “no vers is libre for the man who wants to do a good job.”

It is evident that while Mr. Eliot was holding free verse at arm’s length, he was very definitely holding on to it. This gesture of repugnance in combination with a claim of possession intimidated writers by its very complex nature, and it left Mr. Eliot in a position to continue writing his own very interesting vers libre. •

However, in more recent years, Mr. Eliot does not seem to be holding to this attitude with its constricting tendencies. It is, indeed, admirable of him to have made public these shifts in position. In his study of Milton in *The Sewanee Review* (Spring, 1948), he shears away the tendrils attaching his disdain to free verse in these words (after quoting a critical statement by Samuel Johnson relating to Miltonic blank verse):

Some of my audience may recall that this last remark, in

almost the same words, was often made, a literary generation

ago, about the “free verse” of the period: and even without

this encouragement from Johnson it would have occurred

to my mind to declare Milton to be the greatest master of

free verse in our language.

Mr. Eliot's use of quotation marks in his allusion to the free verse of a previous generation might imply that he doubts the validity of his own work of that period as well as that of Pound, Sandburg and H. D.; but, here, at last, the gesture of odium is gone, and the harm is more than half undone. In the second mention of free verse, even the quotation marks drop away, leaving the term as the central blazing facet in Mr. Eliot's elaborate compliment to the author of *Paradise Lost*.

CONTRIBUTORS

PETER M. URQUHART and DESMOND STEWART are British poets.

Mr. Stewart is now living in Bagdad, and is the author of *Leopard in the Grass*, a novel about Iraq.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA claims ELINOR LENNEN, LUCILLE EVANS and CECIL KYLE as residents.

MARCIA MASTERS, who lives in Kenilworth, Illinois, read from her poems at the New York Public Library on a program sponsored by the Poetry Society of America.

ROSE ROSBERG is a librarian at the High School of Music and Art in New York City.

The Saturday Review of Literature and other periodicals have published Candace Stevenson's poems.

HELEN FRITH STICKNEY, a former vice-president of the Poetry Society of America, is the author of *Prelude to Winter*, a book of poems.

Poems by ELMA DEAN were reprinted on two occasions from *Recurrence* by the Oakland Tribune.

FLORENCE KERR BROWNELL'S verse has been published in *Poetry* (Chicago), *Voices* and *The Poetry Chap-Book*.