

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

<i>Aftermath.</i> Peter M. Urquhart	3
<i>The Glimpse.</i> Maureen Cobb Mabbott	4
<i>Still Life Abstraction.</i> Maureen Cobb Mabbott	5
<i>Today.</i> Ray Ballard	6
<i>Retreat.</i> Cecil Kyle	7
<i>Self-Portrait.</i> Cecil Kyle	8
<i>Old Woman.</i> Cecil Kyle	9
<i>Ascent.</i> Cecil Kyle	10
<i>Skilled Labor.</i> Myron H. Broomell	11
<i>The Enchanted Recluse.</i> David Borden	12
<i>Star Fever.</i> Kathryn Ainsworth Grover	13
<i>Chronicle on Space.</i> Elinor Lennen	14
<i>Your Tree.</i> Elinor Lennen	15
<i>Maiden Lady.</i> Marie Erwin Ward	16
<i>Rain.</i> Robert Townsend Rogers	17
<i>Contributors</i>	18



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GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

AFTERMATH

Peter M. Urquhart

With the wailing cry of the world,
The wind streamed in the trees
Screamed in the wires, drowning
The recognized news of familiar ways
Of evil and usual death
In an empty and terrible song.

We stood in the roads of its force,
Feeling it moulding our rags to our bodies;
As naked, we held ourselves to its desire
Probing and pressing, blinding us,
Leaving us deaf
To all but the dirge
That seemed like nothing.
We stood in its void, for a time,
And heard, but dared not know—

We stood in the void of the wind, for a time,
Then returned to sheltering stone
To huddle our bodies and numb beliefs
In the little corners of lamentation.
We prayed for the wind to pass
And leave us alone in the dull hells
Of cities built to mock ourselves;

And the wind passed and left us,
Crouched in the safety of known pain.

THE GLIMPSE

Maureen Cobb Mabbott

O'Keefe, through pelvic bone,
desert-abraded and bleached
to art in Arizona;

Lovers, through intuition
(dizzily steep and swift
the stairs of their communion),
have sighted blue infinity.

Both art and love report
they found the azure glimpse
heart-shaped, entirely beautiful.

STILL LIFE ABSTRACTION

Maureen Cobb Mabbott

The Greek torso, roseate, glows
As if forever on the table
Beside the grapes, piled high
And purple in an alabaster dish.

But coming into the room
One sees that mirrors—
The eyes of many men,
The many eyes within a man—
Shatter the easy vision.

The grapes, globed fruit no longer,
But sharp-edged segments
Play and flicker and pierce,
Dissecting the light.

Elusive and unsubstantial
The lost, refrangible torso gleams
And dazzles and dances,
Focused to ruby, filtered to blue
Nothingness.

T O D A Y

Ray Ballard

Inside his glass-walled prison the child sits,
fascinated by shadowy figures
riding out of the drifting mists of tomorrow
up to—but not into—his crystal cage.

Soon tomorrow will surrender to yesterday,
and a voice like dry leaves fallen
will ask petulantly:
why did today never come?
But the only reply will be an echo
thrown back by unbreakable glass walls.

RETREAT

Cecil Kyle

A butterfly
Dragging torn wings
Through the dust,
A snail shedding silver
Across the grass,
And you trying clumsily to cover your heart
With hands.

SELF - PORTRAIT

Cecil Kyle

Shivering,
With its metaphysical coat collar turned up,
My little soul
Sits scowling at terrifying space
And dazzling immensity;
Dreaming a cozy heaven of parlours,
Teas and candlelight,
And comforting decadence
Done in half tones.

OLD WOMAN

Cecil Kyle

They come no more
With sweet smelling leaves
And bitter herbs, fresh with the taste of earth.

They come no more
With violets and sheaves of long streaming grasses;
No longer the little children
Come to my door with their May baskets.

They come no more with their eagerness and clamour
To drink of my fresh churned milk,
To pet the new spotted calf.

No more they come
With swift laughter
And talk of bird eggs,
Blue, brown-spotted, white,
And faintly pink as an ocean shell.

No more they come . . .
This shy spring sunshine
Is like rare silk on my roughened hands,
Like a small tired head on my shoulder,
And soft hair against my face.

ASCENT

Cecil Kyle

At morning,
I have watched gladioli,
As birds take flight
From sheath of leaves
And tight buds,
And from the impetus of this green ladder,
I have vaulted to the sun.

SKILLED LABOR

Myron H. Broomell

A knight pricks rampant o'er a darkling plain.
In background, topless towers.
His mount, caparisoned beyond comparison,
Drips sheet-like chains of silver, or chained skirts
Of heavy dignity. Pure horse,
It bears the rider.

Conceive a visage hidden by a visor,
A pennon clung to the spear's neck, and a dagger
Shined since it last accorded misery.

Upon his shield,
An extended lion.

THE ENCHANTED RECLUSE

David Borden

No, denial in his upturned palms
is not pride. For he resides isolated
in the swamp—humility like miasma—
says lilies grow as big as moons
from the marly ooze
(where he also hurls old seedy dreams
to see what giant plants may grow)
nor is it the edge of madness
behind the orbic flames of his eyes.
Enchanted with nature's swamp-fires,
he loves darkness, wise owl's vision,
sings the dark peace of his cypresses.

STAR FEVER

Kathryn Ainsworth Grover

All night I hear the stars falling,
until I am satiated with their perpendicular retreat—
they shrink from the big eye of the cerulean bough,
shuddering earthward,
alienated from suspension.

I would abandon this gregarious descendancy,
but I am suffocated with their sudden greenness.

All night I hear the stars falling;
if I rise from my couch,
if I call into the darkness,
they will continue in mercurial exodus,
and I am left to ponder earth's abundance
and heaven's lunacy.
With incomprehension in my mind
and stars in my dooryard,
I lament their sea-proportions, but they come ever
down
and down,
and surely down.

CHRONICLE ON SPACE

Elinor Lennen

Here in the desert
Time's wheel revolves without noise,
And the circumference of days
Rounds into seasons, years, ages.

Silence, the oldest inhabitant,
Rebukes the newcomer.
Mortals are transients,
Whatever their life span
Here where milleniums passed
And scarcely were named in their going.

YOUR TREE

Elinor Lennen

Moment on moment,
Take eternity's small fruit
From your tree of time.

Seasonless, never hurried nor delayed,
It is for you.

None other plucks from your tree;
You only can be thrifty, prodigal—
Can mature the instant
Into memorable hours, days, years.

MAIDEN LADY

Marie Erwin Ward

She dusts with exquisite care
The turquoise vase,
The time-worn ivory fan,
The china shepherdess.
Her touch is the whisper
Of a hummingbird's wing.
As she dusts,
The dried petals of her memories,
Her all of life,
Sift in breathless spirals,
As the dust,
From the fragile porcelain rose jar
Of her heart.

RAIN

Robert Townsend Rogers

It is
a season of incessant rain;
black clouds form endlessly over the grey ocean
and crawl
clumsily up the sullen hills.
It is
a time of hardness
 cold glistening leaves
black roots digging in.
Rain from my heart
makes vein-like ripples
on the muddy stone-cut earth.

CONTRIBUTORS

PETER M. URQUHART recently left England to live in Toronto, Canada. His work has appeared several times in both this quarterly and *Recurrence* during the past two years.

In 1949 MAUREEN COBB MABBOTT's poem, "The Lengthening of Hems," received one of the principal prizes for magazine verse from Poetry Awards.

A lecture on the technique of writing free verse will be given by MARIE ERWIN WARD at a meeting of the Poets' Round Table of Little Rock, Arkansas.

A poem by DAVID BORDEN was recently reprinted in "A Week of Verse," the famous column of reprinted poems in the Sunday New York Herald Tribune.

Five contributors to this issue are Western poets. They are MYRON H. BROOMELL, CECIL KYLE, DAVID BORDEN, KATHRYN AINSWORTH GROVER, ELINOR LENNEN and ROBERT TOWNSEND ROGERS. All of them are now living in California with the exception of Mr. Broomell whose home is in Durango, Colorado.

A poem by RAY BALLARD appeared not long ago in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*. He lives in the Netherlands West Indies.