

VARIATION

A Free Verse Quarterly

Volume IX · Autumn 1954 · Number 36

*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

[*The copy photographed for this edition takes folios 68 and 69 — Patricia Benton's *The Obscure Center* and Kay DeBard Hall's *Itinerant Carnival* — in one frame, as an opening, where every other leaf of the number has a frame to itself. The two leaves are cut apart at the printer's gutter before the reading is made, and both poems are set below under their own headings. Nothing is missing from the number: folios 63 to 77 are all present. Because the frame is divided, the Scan p.*

figures from folio 70 onward stand one ahead of the page numbers of the file as it was delivered.]

VARIEGATION: A FREE VERSE QUARTERLY is published by
Variegation Publishing Company. 25¢ a copy, \$1.00 a year.

All correspondence for *Variegation: A Free Verse Quarterly* and
Recurrence: A Quarterly of Rhyme should be addressed to
Variegation Publishing Company, Post Office Box 75384,
Sanford Station, Los Angeles 5, California.

GROVER JACOBY, *Editor*

VARIEGATION and RECURRENCE are being widely distributed
to bookstores and newsstands by B. DEBOER, Post Office Box
761, Hoboken, New Jersey.

[*The publisher's own advertisement, from the last leaf:*]

ENJOY THE OTHER EMPHASIS AS WELL. You will find in *Recurrence* that rhyme is more modern than many think. Although *Recurrence* and *Variegation* are probably the only magazines intended to complement each other in terms of writing technique in the history of periodical literature, they do often meet on common ground. For instance, both quarterlies use a considerable quantity of poetry experimental in form and content, though the conventional forms are amply represented in *Recurrence*.

CANYON IN YELLOWSTONE

Gertrude May Lutz

(Autumn)

We have come to this ledge to stand in a wound of
wind—
sun with the snow-feel on our face,
our hands.

In this place things that are, were;
things that were, will be.

Cliffs explode color: magenta streaked as cloth
twined in a Blackfoot's braids,
blunted as liquid sulphur
oozing from thermal spring,
juttred and jagged as bear teeth,
as horns of antlered elk.

In our ears a muted thunder—
we glimpse far falls,
and solid water threads stone depths
like a hardened skein of steel.

I CAN BE A HERO TO THE GRASS

George Abbe

I shall never take procession's head,
sheathed in the damask of a limousine,
the canonizing tides of gold braid,
motor's perfect murmur, and sunlight,
my smile of power being suckled from me
by the glutton crowd.

Athirst to be known, I will not grovel.
Atomic brine of banknotes geysered up
through all the opened wounds of subject peoples
sickens me beyond all strength
of virtue or public action.
I cannot champion it.
Music, talk, and theatre of the usual day
wind me in cold wire of death.

But last night, up through May trees, white
and sweet
with the night's mercy and blossoms, past nest
of hatched robins
sleeping under wings, in a love long lost to man,
I saw the soft stars, reverent as those petals
dim in the porch light reflected in robins' eyes,
and thought: both star and robin know me:
parent birds tomorrow coming close to take the
worms I dig,
and young eye watching over nest rim;

they know me, do not fear nor mock.
Perhaps I am a hero to the bird.
Maybe I shall be remembered in some pool
 of impulse,
agileam, far-future, in robin's racial memory,
caught in a byway hollow of blind generations' flow.
Man nails his hate and terror to my eyes;
the bird accepts me, wonders, and exalts
the fact of food I offer and my power to dig,
and by his grace of gentleness gives me sight.

Today, under a banking of deep grass
I caught the scent of earth-mold and green;
and all the smells of grass that lay like hunting dogs
on the old hearths of my youth
rose up and bayed and filled me with gentle tumult.
And pride raised branches against stars again
and knowledge that I may have some meaning
 beyond man:
warm-nested hope and comfort and natural sureness,
tree-held, swung, lifted, crowning my world
with exaltation out of prenatal time.

I champion the grass. Replying, it knows
my value and my motive,
my yearning to exert what men despise.
Through senses' arch I stride, upheld
by millions of green blades, tumultuous and
 hand-clapping.
I triumph for all who share
my inwardness and my renunciation.
Victor for meekness that perceives my fortitude
I can still be a hero to the grass.

FUEL

William Millett

Autos seek collision
 and still they fear intimacy
in the sleek, circular ligaments
of those rubber treads
rolling onto rivers of black stone
 whose troughs and banks of cement
are paid for by the
 waxed by-products of
 boredom.
Can these prefabricated engines;
 burning the bodies of
 another age,
answer this—
shall we be fuel for the future race?

EXODUS

William Millett

The moon rolls on webs,
 magnetized
in an elliptical path—
 a detached eye
rolling over stars
that sprinkle fire-sparks
on the immense black bag of night.

We fall
suspended inside
our blowtorch,
eating the distance, absolute
as a projectile,
a meteor drowning in space
to contact, to plunge
into our satellite,
open up new frontiers—
invade if need be.

THE OBSCURE CENTER

Patricia Benton

Always
the stranger mind
is wilderness
where tree-shafts
are copper in sunlight
and thought
with outspread antlers
is cautious and aware
of the invader.

ITINERANT CARNIVAL

Kay DeBard Hall

See how far down in that great circle of dark
Smaller circles of light call childhood:
How Ferris wheels roll tall hoops across sky,
How vendors shake rounds of blue—of gold;
Their wares go spinning like tops.

We know the carousel revolves
Like a clock sprung metal music.
Wood horses lure—Arabian Nights,
Robin Hood, Iliad.
The cocks crow.

Carnival, where are our children,
O where?

NEW DEVELOPMENT

Lisa Grenelle

Project for underprivileged—
buildings undefiled (as yet)
by obscene chalkings, beer cans,
broken toys, or peanut shells.

But the children at once
reject such rehabilitation,
reverting joyously to jungle living
in a condemned tenement.

Here, if not heaven, is home,
a loud and lusty reality,
uncensored expression,
violent and vital.

REFRIGERIUM

Grover Jacoby

The whole world eats from one dish,
The sky's dish of blue glass.
All men with light or dark skins
When their eyes are hungry
Relish scoops of white cloud.

ADVENTURE IN FALL
SUNLIGHT

Grover Jacoby

Let us lose ourselves
In the processions of shadow,
Where the alley of trees
Rises into the sun—
A lace of darkness
Thrust upon the dazzle,
A tangle of mystery
Breathing at the heart of light.

WITNESS

Jean Burden

It will not be told
while we are here to tell it.
The words are not in any dialect
our tongues can form;
the vernacular is from another planet.

The symbols will not be cut in marble,
nor hacked in mountain sides as testament.
They will not be drawn with pointed stick
on the plain land.

The cipher will not be broken
while we live to break it.
It will not be said or sung.
If at all, it will be found by tomb-defilers
 of another age
on a cold scarab of the dead.

THE FOG

Marcia Masters

This morning I walked down a country road
Where winter and spring bickered over the
 shiny puddles,
And the sun loosened my coat and my collar.
I was in love with day.

This afternoon I am closed in by rain
And my thoughts
And the fog waging a slow white war
In my garden.

Oh, I do not belong in a house,
No matter how pretty,
Who learned my ways in the dunes
When the steep wind was calling.

CONTINUITY

Lucile V. McCurtain

In the sharded village
my footsteps echo.
The shrill wind is the mingled voices
of those who have gone.

The corner bricks are unmeshed
and the walls slant;
the white plaster yawns at the sky.
Only the swallows have come back,
nesting in unthinkable crevices.

In this skeletoned village
the ancient stream gurgles under the
rubble;
the seeds of grasses from somewhere
find soil, flourish;
a blue flower sucks at the water's edge.

I listen to the stream,
and marvel at the continuity of grass.

DRESSMAKER BY THE SEA

Ethelford Carroll

Near this west window, its view of sea
She spreads patience and pattern
On the cutting table,
Feels in a needle's short length of silver
The silver longness of water.
In the slow movement of thread,
On creasings of the accurate hem
Her hands become tedium of pin and marker.
Here she sews. Here cooling tea and fatigue
Inhabit the room.
She eats alone one chocolate more
Half listens later to consequential chatter
Of after dinners news,
Escapes to silences of sky and unthimble stars.

Tomorrow's women will bring to her
Bright fabric restlessness of their days.
Now, in her last year's dress
Under her last year's coat
She walks where there is smoothness of night
on sand,
Where there is unwindowed view of sea.

TOM-TOMS

M. A. Mays

Wide as summer twilight
drums plow deserts whole
without furrow,
tone lower than guttural,
deeper than chest bone.

Here, without angle,
without edge—
drums,
a weather of drums;
sound
by bone, by blood,
by bundle of body:
ears enormous with it
as man holds
tangled centuries of drums.

CONTRIBUTORS

LUCILLE V. MCCURTAIN is at present teaching courses in the writing and appreciation of poetry in Richmond and Oakland. The course in Richmond is sponsored by the state of California.

Bird in the Mulberry is the title of GEORGE ABBE's new book of poems.

GERTRUDE MAY LUTZ, KAY DEBARD HALL, ETHELFORD CARROLL and M. A. MAYS are familiar with the theories advanced by Lawrence Hart. Their work is proof that Mr. Hart's teaching does not prevent the poet's development along original lines.

LISA GRENELLE is a native of the city of New York.

Verse by WILLIAM MILLETT continues to make its appearance in the avant-garde magazines.

The Autumn issues of both this quarterly and Recurrence contain poems by JEAN BURDEN and MARCIA MASTERS.