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The
LYRIC WEST

A Magazine of American Verse



IN THIS ISSUE

Hazel Hall | Martha Webster Merriehew

Paul Tanaquil | Harry Noyes Pratt

Carey McWilliams and others

MISS EDNA MILLAY

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The Lyric West

Vol. IV, No. 1

A Magazine Of Verse

October, 1924

Edited by Roy Towner Thompson and Grace Atherton Dennen

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The Lyric West

3551 University Avenue, Los Angeles, California

Editors

Roy Towner Thompson

Grace Atherton Dennen

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Hazel Hall

Hand in Sunlight

This is my hand I lift to you;
It is not whitened leaf, O Sun.
And these thin cords of quivering blue
Lacing the pulse, are veins that run
Beneath the flesh to make it white.
These are my fingers, not twigs pale
From too long hanging in the light.
Supple as reed yet firm as mail,
They droop but for a shape of ease,
Are quiet for the sake of fine
Shadows that rim them and increase
The accuracy of their design.
You are but background; you are spun
From tinsel in a glittered mesh.
My hand stands out like white bronze. Sun,
I shame you with my tepid flesh.

Beulah May

In the Wind

I love all blowing things,
Youths with tossed back hair,
The soft garments of maidens whipping against their
limbs,
Trees new in leaf, long grass in the meadows,
White doves against a white sky,
The sails of fair ships,
All things young, all things free,
All things happy in the wind,
I love all blowing things.

Lilian White Spencer

To a Bride

I who sit quietly, my listless hand
Turning the last dull page before me spread
Of a stained record, in still sorrow read,
At her approach, with reverence, rise and stand
Hiding my sordid book as contraband
To those wide eyes. She has a queen's high head
But mine, that seems as bright, is bowed; instead
Of such dear pride, I wear a secret brand.

White joy now dancing down sweet lanes of spring,
Walk at the end, only through autumn gold
After the summer's fruitful flowering!
O life be gentle; from this rose withhold
The frosts that blacken; let no winter bring
To her the blight that made my young heart old!

Ellen Coit Elliott

The Garlanded Sword

My love gave me a two-edged sword,
A white and six red roses.
He laughed and thought, “The blade is hid
Among the pretty posies.”

I laughed and made a rosy crown
And wore it to the Maying.
The sword sprang up and struck us down
Together in our playing.

Elizabeth J. Coatsworth

The Crows of Bayeux

In and out

Round about

Past gargoyles' backs and martyrs' faces

The devil's birds are showing their paces

Weaving the morris of all the hells

To the sainted sound of the tower bells

Lightly

Sprightly

Black as pitch

Like coals drawn from their native fires

They dance among the holy spires

Then each one rests upon the head

Of a blue-cheeked gargoyle, demon-bred,

Whispering together, stone and bird,

Worse blasphemies than were ever heard,

Blasphemies against the Saviour

And the Virgin's own behaviour,

Then coolly claim, while they make merry,

The privileges of sanctuary!

Martha Webster Merriehew

Inheritance

Whereof is a cloud under the sun
Trailing a shadow on, and on,
Over sand, over blue sea,
A hill, a pond . . . or me

I am a shadow drawn
After a cloud as it has gone.

What is a cloud, to tether me;
And what may I, the shadow, be;
What has the cloud, what have I done;
What part over all is he, the sun?

Mirza French Mackay

Romany Road

A fair word, and a fond word, and a word spoke true—
But I am off to the west land, where the world's yet
 new;
And it's whither-I-blow, thither-I-go,
 hither-I-take-my-way,
Till I drink deep and a tryst keep where the wind bids
 stay.

A tear falls, and a voice calls, and a hand stays mine,
And a prayer follows my hurrying feet from the fold of
 the ninety-and-nine;
But it's never-I-come, ever-I-roam,
 never-I-make-amends,
Till my world's gold, and my world's old, and the long
 trek ends.

A fear spoke, and a heart broke, and a life ebbs slow—
But out on the careless gipsy trail the wind is calling
 me low;
And it's Jerry-may-care, Jerry-say-where,
 Jerry's-the-odds to me,
And a tramp-home, and a camp-home, where the wind
 blows free.

A fair word, and a fond word, and a word spoke true—
But I am away to the gipsy trail, off to the endless blue;

And it's fiddle-and-I, fiddle-and-die,
fiddle-the-hours-away,
And a gipsy pack by a gipsy track, at the end of a long
day.

Sigrid Sittig

Autumn

Gone mad! The tree tops sway in vain desire toward
the earth;
The air is streaked with flying red of leaves.
Across the sky
Soft-bosomed clouds race to their tryst with doom;
The demon wind
Laughs, knowing this last spurt of life is but the dance
of death.

Mary Sinton Leitch

Johnny Onions

He loafs along the dock where the little fruit-boats
rock;

You will know old Johnny Onions by his gait,
For he rolls and heaves and lurches;
If you stop to make a purchase
Of an orange, you can use it as a bait,
For fruit is Johnny's passion
In his own peculiar fashion;
One date can change a pine into a palm,
And the very scent of mango
Makes him yearn to dance the tango
The way black Juanita danced it down in Guam.
A single red banana
Can transport him to Havana;
Though the years have laid old Johnny by the lee,
Yet his windward fancies range
Over waters wide and strange
And his gaze is ever outward to the sea.

He will tell you he was cook upon the square-rig, "Molly
Look,"

In the days before the lime-juice Parliament,
When the men had tots of rum
And the Chinks their opium;
Salt horse was sweet washed down with 'aggie-dent'
Plum duff and hot dog's body;

Ah, poor John, he would to God 'e
Could taste 'ash like that — then pass to Davy Jones!
He is only a beach-comber,
Yet the name is a misnomer
Though gunny bags are all the clothes he owns;
For clean the salt winds blow
Upon Johnny's heart, I know;
Across his spirit wild they blow and free;
Something wistful, something wise,
You will find within his eyes
That are searching —ever searching — for the sea!

Eleanor Mathews Stevens

Homesickness

Moon, I am faint with longing
To see you rise
Through the bent forms of eucalyptus trees
That carry the burden of the summer's drought
On their stooped shoulders;

To find you reflected
In the broad sea waters
That beckon to the islands
Lost in the mist of enchantment;

To see you make a glory
Above the mountains that run down to the waves
And gather soft moisture
To their scorched breasts;

To watch you lay the shadows of the pepper tree
Across the face of my beloved,
When the sun has left the adobe cool in the nightfall
And the palms are quiet in sleep.

Paul Tanaquil

Stratagem

Slyly he will pry apart
Thin bars of attitude
That cage him quaintly
In picturesque indifference—

Out of their elastic metal
He will weave a fillet
Of sighs to crown you
Light and decorative,

He will twill a girdle
Of smiles to belay you,
To question your eyes by day,
To urge in your breasts by night,

He will forge a chain
Of hot tears to shackle you,
Each link branding sorrow
On your submissive flesh,

He will fasten a noose
Of laughter, sharp
As a scalpel, about
Your slender neck.

Betty Dickinson Frazee

Doubt Is a Gray Moth

Doubt is a gray moth,
Clinging to the scarlet passion flower of youth.
Cease fluttering moth—
For I would swing fearlessly in the wind
On the terrace of truth.

Caroline Ainslie

Accomplishment

He lived and worked and loved and dreamed
And planned a little house,
Its roof a friendly canopy
Brushed by green balsam boughs.

But as the lived-out years fell by
Though gallantly he strove,
His little house had no more roof
Than had the hemlock grove.

It was enough when hastening days
Faded with all they brought,
The doorway of a little house
Swung open to his thought.

Ted Olson

We Shall Go Laughing

What idiot god
Brought this mad marriage to fruition here—
Mismating flame and clod?
What howls of obscene mirth
Blew down the gusty corridors of time
When on the gray flanks of the cooling earth
The chemic slime
Stirred with a motion that was not the sea's,
Stirred through the drab leagues of the primal fen
Remote and far,
Stirred impotently, blindly — aye, awoke!
And with the ache of being even then
Racking it to a strange dis-ease,
(O Idiot Demiurge, your master stroke!)
Stretched out a microscopic tentacle
To snare a star!

O Idiot-Jester — God,
Iniquitous and cruel and abhorred—
I fling you back your laughter — I,
Flame-fretted clod,
One who has learned the true iniquity
Of that gargantuan jest in earth's red morn;
One who is torn
Near unto death by wars
Of fire and slime;

One who has found it vain to clutch at stars,
But is not reconciled
To the primordial, mute oblivion.
(How can flame be content
To be drawn back into the sun,
Having been individual, sentient?
How can clod
Sink to the primal darkness whence it came,
Having once fused with flame?)

And yet, O Jester-God,
I laugh!
At you —at earth, your plaything — at my own
Foul heritage of slime.
From my own weakness I have beaten out
A weapon that shall strike you from your throne
And put your tyranny to rout.
I laugh!
And down the gusty corridors of time
Wind of your doom is blowing.
This is the vengeful harvest of your sowing.
You mated flame and slime . . .
Now has the clod
Found courage and a voice.
He laughs!

Dust mocks the god
That made it — and the god shall fall!
And for a little time
The echo of that devastating mirth
Shall blow tumultuously across the earth,

Spurring all things to revel and rejoice.
And we shall half forget
The foul, abysmal secret of our birth;
Forget that we are slime.

Aye, to the last dim flickering of the flame
That dwindles even now;
When the eternal frost draws tight its net
To strangle this half-conscious clod we tread,
We shall go laughing back into the dread
Dark ordure whence we came,
Fearless, unhesitant, ironic, proud
That we, who are but slime, can stand at last
Erect, unbowed;
That when our little hour is past
We can go laughing . . .

Clare D. Stewart

Offering!

I climb,
And the trees climb with me.
They have the air of knowing where we go.
I climb,
And the trees climb on ahead.
They bring up the rear.
They march abreast.
They march in silence,
The silence of a guard's march
About a captive.

I climb,
And the trees hang back.
They shout a final "Taboo"
In a great chorus of silence.
I am delivered.
I am alone with the rock,
With the great halo of quest
And the thrum of my heart valve's labor!

On! Up!
For here begins
Yon far high trail of arduous delight,
Where crest on crest
The huddled crags beyond,
Each in its raw, stark, hammering immensity

Bids for the naked soul!

I am the idolator!

I am captive.

I could bare my chest on that highest crag

As an altar stone,

And offer the old, grim, pulsing sacrifice

To the high priests of the sky!

Harry Noyes Pratt

The Pine Tree

Above me the Pine Tree,
Serene, old, and aloof,
Looked to the sky;
And I said,
“Here, surely, is peace!”
And I said to the Pine Tree:
“Tell me, O Ancient,
That I may find
The source of thy peace;
That I too may find
Peace!”
Slowly the Pine Tree answered,
And said:
“When the winds of winter
Have spread the white snows about you;
When the suns of spring
Have melted their drifting,
And about you have thundered
The streams of the summer,
The white streams of summer
In tumultuous rushing;
When the haze
And the softness of autumn
Have drifted about you—
Spring, summer, autumn, and winter,—
Again and again

In recurrent succession
Until the beginning is dim
And the ending approaches;
Then shall you know
That Peace is the building
Of endless tumultuous forces,—
In age-long succession,
Destroying,
Continually re-building,
Until in completion,
Alone in completion,
Is Peace.

Criss-cross Pattern

The birds stitch
Back and forth
A criss-cross pattern
Until the sky is a maze
Of threads of flight.

Across the sky
From tree to tree
And earth to sky
And tree again,
With now and then
To hold, a stitch
Upon the hillside,
Or, over the orchard
A thread they fasten
In a high tree
Upon the mountain.

Emily Randle

Aspiration

If I could do as the wind,
Glide over white cornices
And fret at front doors
Till dismayed faces peep out;
Then draw apart
And fill rooms of vacant houses
With only cracks for entrance,
Bang doors and shutters
Till it be said: “Ghosts are abroad;”
Give perfumed musicals
In sweet fern beds
And loose blossoms from June bridal-wreaths;
Then rouse the ire of forest fires
And jump from cliffs into the sea
To cool myself;
Hide behind trees on half-moon nights
To watch swaying bodies
Noiselessly turn silver-poplar leaves—
I should be happy.

William E. Scotten, Jr.

Two French Towns

AVIGNON

The rock of the Cathedral
Bold-faced
Bathed in the bright sun of Provence

The palace of the Popes
Chalk-white
Many-towered
Ponderous

Within—
Deep embrasured windows
Groined ceilings
Slowly peeling frescoes
Dust
Ages
Then down the steep streets
Between close-shuttered houses

The Hotel d'Europe
A room on a shady court
Where Napoleon slept
And across the sunny street
A little wineshop
Cool

Odorous

Out thru the hot dusty gate
In the ramparts
A battlemented girdle
That keeps the town from slipping into the Rhone

The little chapel
On the broken bridge where the whole world danced
And across
High Villeneuve
Walled and towered
Amid dry vineyards

That is Avignon

ROUEN

Gray stone tracery
Gray lead roofs
The gray sky of Normandy

Spires
Fretted
Heaven-pointing
Cross-tipped

And the round squat tower of Jeanne

St. Ouen
Gray
Buttressed
Like a many-fingered claw
Clutching at the city

In the font
A glimpse of long colonnaded nave
And tall windows like showers of rubies
Sapphires

A candle-lit spiral stair
In the thickness of the wall
The triforium
A six fathom glance into the church
From a narrow stone gallery

Then down thru cobbled alleys
Foul-guttered
With half-timbered houses jutting out overhead
Till the sky is a ribbon

Down to the quays
And the gray Seine
With its blunt-nosed barges going down on the tide

That is Rouen

E. Richard Shipp

Three Sketches

CHIMNEYS

Furnace fires roar
and tall stacks spew
black and grey snakes
that squirm and writhe,
coiling and uncoiling
their length against the sky
in fantastic patterns
that shift and change,
then, like pale ghosts
fade into nothingness.

SWEAT SHOP

A dirty, drab loft,
foul and ill-smelling,
where men and women
furtively watch the boss—
and the clock—
and toil in nervous haste
lest they fall below
the stint they must do
to hold the job
that fills their lank bellies.

JUDAS

They paid your price
so you sold Him to the butchers,
like a sheep,
or a dry cow,
and they led Him away;
led Him to the abattoir.
What did you care,
accursed one?
They paid your price—
Thirty pieces of silver.

Miss Edna Millay

An Informal Appreciation

It has been rather a hobby with recent critics to spend their powers upon the more bizarre and “unorthodox” manifestations of the new poetic impulse in America. And quite naturally so. What critic, trained perhaps in an older school, would not be tempted by such a lure as Ezra Pound, Alfred Kreymborg, Amy Lowell, E. E. Cummings? But there are modern poets who, while abiding by the older standards, have managed to breathe new life and warmth and freshness into their work. These seem rather to be neglected by the critics. In his article not long since on recent American poetry, for instance, H. L. Mencken completely overlooked Edna St. Vincent Millay. Yet the sonnets and lyrics of this young writer have scarcely been surpassed for exquisite loveliness.

In reading Miss Millay one is struck at once by her extreme naturalness of idiom. In this she is essentially modern. The development of naturalness in English poetry since the time, say, of Burns, has been the subject of much discussion. Today we take for granted what in the eighteenth century seemed poetic heresy. Miss Millay has none of the “poetic” language of the Victorians; her verse does not abound in “o’ers” and “neaths.” She addresses no apostrophes to the moon. Her verse is as unaffected as a child’s dialogue. It is perfectly natural. She sees with the eyes of a child, but her pen is the pen of an artist. She has taken the “old, old words” and played lovely harmonies upon them.

In her first volume of verse, *Renascence*, (1917), which ushered her at once into the front rank of contemporary poets, she reveals this naturalness. Particularly in the long poem “Renascence,” the poet talks of the deepest and most beautiful things in the most simple language. The poem begins with a

bit of childish fancy:

All I could see from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood;
I turned and looked another way,
And saw three islands in a bay

and grows gradually into a sustained, beautiful vision of Earth and Heaven and the Soul therein, but never does the language cease to be simple. Although cosmic things are talked of, it is with the words of a child and poet, not of a philosopher.

But Miss Millay's passion for beauty is, perhaps, the force that gives her poetry the greatest vitality. All poets have more or less of this unutterable, maddening sense of a perfection or beauty which can never be realized but which is, nevertheless, ceaselessly striven for. But only a few can capture the words to express this longing. That Miss Millay does so, is saying that she is a poet of distinction. One of the lyrics, "God's World," in her first volume, is an example of her burning love of beauty:

O World, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
Thy mists that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot hold thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart. — Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me, — let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

With the publication of *A Few Figs from Thistles*, (1920), Miss Millay strikes a new note. There is none of the old fervor, none of the old passion for beauty. In their stead are sophisticated, ironic phrases that happen, somehow, and happily, to rhyme. Amusing, cryptic, delicious tidbits they are, but without the “high seriousness” of the earlier volume. They are bits of gossamer, tinkling chimes, frosty sentiments, all written laughingly, for mere virtuosity’s sake. “Midnight Oil” is a fair sample:

Cut if you will, with Sleep’s dull knife.
Each day to half its length, my friend, —
The years that Time takes off my life,
He’ll take from off the other end!

With *Second April*, (1921), Miss Millay forsakes her dilettantism of the previous volume, and returns once more to her real singing. An increasing note of sorrow is present; sorrow caused, in some measure at least, by the death of a very dear girl friend of Miss Millay’s about this time. Here is an example, quite characteristic of the volume as a whole:

Give away her gowns,
Give away her shoes;
She has no more use
For her fragrant gowns;
Take them all down,
Blue, green, blue,
Lilac, pink, blue,
From their padded hangers;
She will dance no more
In her narrow shoes;
Sweep her narrow shoes
From the closet floor.

In her latest volume, *The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems*, Miss Millay does work that fulfills all the promise of her first verse. The volume closes with a group of sonnets, quite

incomparable in their vein, with any others of our time. Lizette Woodworth Reese, to be sure, has a more silent eloquence, a more serene composure, a more philosophic calm, but she lacks the wild ecstasy of Miss Millay. In these deathless sonnets, Miss Millay sings from the ashes of hope forsaken, of love long smiled at.

Miss Millay in her quest for beauty has found it not so much in nature, nor in “frenzied, fitful” love, but in the products of her own creation, in the loveliness of words, in the “frosty and half-ironical musings” of her mind. This solution, supreme as it is, is yet poor consolation. Intellectual achievement is an inadequate substitute, at best, for a love of beauty unattained. The nearest approach to that beauty is in giving expression to one’s love for it. Miss Millay has long since pierced the hollow mockery of human love, has divined its frailties, but she goes on loving just the same.

As Sheila Kaye-Smith says: “Love is the last barbarism.”

—*Carey McWilliams*

Between Editor and Reader

A page of comment, notes, and news

With this issue the Lyric West resumes publication after a six months' vacation. During the three years of its life the magazine achieved a place among the poetry magazines of the country quite surprising even to its founders. Its circulation was nation-wide; it had many loyal friends everywhere. Its contributors included many well-known poets of both East and West. Altogether the foundation laid by the magazine was so solid, and the prospects for its future so bright, that not to have carried on would have been to neglect a mission. Consequently the magazine will go on.

The poetry printed will be of the highest possible grade consistent with the opportunities and resources of the magazine. In whatever form the germ of poetry is found, if it be genuine poetry, whether the form be new or old — it will be printed.

It will be the policy of the magazine to devote more of its space than heretofore to prose articles, comment, and reviews. In every way it will strive to be a medium for the expression of true poetry, and the meeting place of opinions about poetry.

Prizes

While the magazine, at present, cannot pay for its contributions, it will offer each year a series of prizes for the best work contributed. A definite announcement as to the nature of these prizes will be made in a later issue.

Since the last issue of the magazine poetry has suffered a double loss: Hazel Hall and Doris Hutchins. Both were much-esteemed contributors to the Lyric West. It is with more of regret than pleasure that we print this month Miss Hall's finely-wrought sonnet.

If you like the Lyric West and have faith in its future you are urged to recommend it to your friends. Perhaps you can send us the names of two or three of your friends who you think would be particularly interested, that we may send them sample copies.

Book Notes

Of particular interest to Southern Californians is the recent volume of poems by Sarah Bixby-Smith entitled *My Sagebrush Garden*. In the initial poem, “My Sagebrush Garden,” the author reveals her love for the out-door world, particularly for that out-door world peculiar to Southern California. This love for, and response to, all that is familiar and dear to Southern Californians is preeminent throughout the volume. Ours is a garden “rimmed by the mountains, roofed by the sun.”

One of the most pleasing sections of the book is that entitled, “Once I was a Little Girl,” of which the following is representative:

A humming-bird built
In a hollyhock tree
Her tiny white nest
Where I could see,
And I liked her
And she liked me.

We are in receipt of *Southern Poems*, printed privately by the author, F. E. Butler, of Jacksonville, Texas. Among the ninety odd poems in the volume one discovers the versatility of the author; he is at once linguist, scholar, philosopher, and poet. Poems steeped in classical learning are interspersed with others written for pure fun. There is “Paris and Helen,” written in the ringing meter of Macaulay; there is “Bampa,” an engaging child poem; there is “The Butterfly,” written with an appropriate delicacy. Some of the poems reveal an unusual historic perspective; others deal with the recent war.