

VOL. V

APRIL 1926

NO. 7

The LYRIC WEST

A Magazine of American Verse



IN THIS ISSUE

Gertrude Farwell | Charles Howard Marsh

Ethel Brodt Wilson | Beulah May

Lois Burton Moon and others

REVIEW - COLOR, BY COUNTEE CULLEN

SUBSCRIPTION \$2.00 PER YEAR

SINGLE COPIES 20c

The Lyric West

Vol. V, No. 7

A Magazine Of American Verse

April, 1926

Edited by Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw

This edition is set from a page-by-page transcription of a scan of the issue. The transcription makes no editorial decisions; the decisions are listed in the file that produced this book. The advertising is not reproduced.

Set by LyricText on 08 August 2026 at 04:47.

CONTENTS

<u>Resurrection</u>	<i>Gertrude Farwell</i>	185
<u>Symbols</u>	<i>Franklin N. Wood</i>	185
<u>The Trail</u>	<i>Edna Davis Romig</i>	186
<u>After Storm</u>	<i>Sigrid Sittig</i>	186
<u>Spring</u>	<i>Sigrid Sittig</i>	187
<u>Wells of Spring</u>	<i>Louis Ginsberg</i>	187
<u>April Madness</u>	<i>Ruth Aughiltree</i>	188
<u>To J—</u>	<i>Charles Howard Marsh</i>	189
<u>Doubting</u>	<i>Virginia McCormick</i>	189
<u>En Tour, a Song Sequence</u>	<i>Alberta Bancroft</i>	190
I. The Gargoyle; II. Treasure; III. Genoa; IV. For Frances Ann; V. The Exile.		
<u>You are Flame thro' my Heart</u>	<i>Doris Lucile Bradley</i>	195
<u>Telegraph Operators</u>	<i>M. Rainsford Haines</i>	196
<u>Assignation</u>	<i>Maud Elfrid Uschold</i>	197
<u>Dawn Songs from the Uplands</u>	<i>Leetha Journey Probst</i>	198
<u>Dreams of Morning</u>	<i>Ethel Brodt Wilson</i>	199
<u>The Wall</u>	<i>LeRoy McLeod</i>	200
<u>The Night Wind</u>	<i>I. D. Perry</i>	201
<u>Eucalyptus Leaves</u>	<i>Ruth Clay Price</i>	201
<u>Shelley in Our House</u>	<i>Jo Hartman</i>	202
<u>Silver Music</u>	<i>Anne Hendrickson</i>	203
<u>Felis Domestica</u>	<i>Richard Dustan</i>	204
<u>Animal</u>	<i>Beulah May</i>	204
<u>Hai-Kai</u>	<i>Jacques Le Clercq</i>	205
<u>Moonrise</u>	<i>R. Marshall Terrell</i>	205
<u>Our Younger Singers</u>		
<u>In Memoriam</u>	<i>Elizabeth Painter</i>	206
<u>Dawn</u>	<i>Homer G. Gane</i>	206
<u>The Artistry of the Stanza. VII</u>	<i>A. G.</i>	207

The Lyric West

Editors: Mr. and Mrs. Allison Gaw

Yearly Subscription \$2.00 Single Copies, 20 Cents

Published Monthly, Except June and August, by the Editors

3551 University Avenue, Los Angeles, California

All Rights Reserved

All manuscripts should be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope. Otherwise The Lyric West cannot be responsible for their return

Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1925, at the Post Office at Los Angeles, California, under Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1926, Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw.

Some Contributors in This Issue

Ruth Augiltree is a frequent contributor to THE LYRIC WEST and other magazines of verse, though much of her time in recent years has been devoted to mystery fiction.

Gertrude Farwell, who returns to THE LYRIC WEST after a long absence, has also published a play for children, with music, *The First Christmas Tree*. She is the wife of Arthur Farwell, the eminent American composer.

Charles Howard Marsh a member of the School of Music of the faculty of the University of Redlands, California, is the author of *Four Japanese Prints for Organ* and *Art Songs*, as well as numerous articles in the leading musical journals. He is a Fellow of the American Guild of Organists.

Professor I. D. Perry is the head of the Department of English of the Los Angeles City High School. This school has just issued an *Anthology of Student Verse* that shows a surprisingly great amount of real poetry written by these younger western singers.

Edna Davis Romig has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Outlook*, *The Yale Review* and many poetry magazines. She is a member of the Department of English, University of Colorado.

Ethel Brodt Wilson is a native daughter of California and the daughter of a well-known artist of San Francisco. Her "Criss-Cross Pattern" in the October issue of last year's LYRIC WEST appears in *Braithwaite's Anthology* for 1925.

Of the twenty-three contributors in this issue one comes from Nevada, one from New York, one from Colorado, one from Florida, one from Virginia, two from New Jersey, two from Illinois, and thirteen from California.

Gertrude Farwell

Resurrection

Above the tomb
Of my slain selves
Rises the Shining Self.

O Thou who hast walked with Death,
O Thou who hast descended
Into the utter Hell
Which is the denial of Thee —
Unveil Thy Face,
And let me kneel before Thee —
Naked —
And, trembling with the beauty
Of this pain of life,
Let me crush the lilies of my death,
That the eternal lily
May flower in Thy hands!

Franklin N. Wood

Symbols

I never see a full-blown rambler rose,
In royal scarlet, spread upon a wall,
But it recalls the agony and shame
In Pilate's Hall.

I never view the dagger-pointed vine,
This scarlet-petaled robe of pomp adorns,
But I can see a weary face — beneath
A crown of thorns.

Edna Davis Romig

The Trail

Soft is the April air, and a soft wind stirring
Mysteries of growing things in the warm earth now;
Coral buds are opening on the cottonwoods and maples
And little silver catkins peep from slender aspen
bough.
Mountain flowers appearing, shyly here or flaunting
boldly —
Though the sweetest flowers of springtime tend to hide
themselves away —
Blue beside a granite boulder, blue against a rounded
hillside,
Blue anemones rise quaintly from their Quaker stalks
of grey.
Tangled thickets of wild cherry lean far over deep-cut
canyons,
Blooming slips of wildwood plum tree wanton with the
ancient pine;
Dawn skies now are radiant, the night time full of
splendor,
And all the day is flooded with the April gleam and
shine.
There are bird-notes from the branches — some are
golden, some are silver;
There seems a breathless waiting; something calls
expectantly.

Oh, my dear one, leave the lowlands, leave the way of
town and city —
For Love is standing on the trail, and beckons you and
me.

Sigrid Sittig

After Storm

Spring rain

Like tears of atonement

For a wanton mood.

The wind-broken lily

Forgives.

Sigrid Sittig

Spring

Sunlight like myriad shining white gulls skimming the
water —

*Beloved, my longing for you hurts
Like the repeated pecking of sharp-billed birds at
my heart.*

Radiant blue sky, all but singing with color —

*Beloved, have you guessed at the mystery of my eyes
after kisses?*

Trembling spring-green of trees —

*Beloved, do you know the shyness that clothes like a
silver mist*

The glowing passion of a woman?

Miracle of flowering blossoms —

*Beloved, can you guess at the despair
Of one who trembles forever at the verge of Spring,
Never to flower?*

Louis Ginsberg

Wells of Spring

How wonderful must be the wells
 Whose fire, burning clean,
Is saturating every hill
 And soaking grasses green.

The green in fountains bubbles up
 Till every rootlet drinks;
It even overflows and fills
 The sullen city's chinks.

And from these same unfathomed wells
 The burning green desire
Is running up my body, too,
 And flooding me with fire!

Ruth Aughiltree

April Madness

The Spring peered in one night as he lay asleep,
And broke through his heavy dreams with a whispered
word,
Calling him from a slumber fathoms deep,
Crying to him until at last he heard.

He sat up, dazed, and stood on the creaking floor;
Still dazed, he dressed, and felt his way from the room.
The night swooped up as he opened the old house-door

The night, with its heady scent of lilac bloom,
And its clamor of frogs, and its sky that seemed all one
star —
And he marked the moon-silvered willows that skirted
the hill,
How they seemed to be double the size that in sunlight
they are,
And he marked how black was the brook, and the wood,
how still.—
Then, lightly and surely, as if it were clearest day,
He ran, who had never run since he was a boy.
He topped the crest and struck a thyme-grown way
That led through the dew to the stars.

He capered for joy;
His spirit and senses merged with the pulsating night.
He leaped the hills like a god and touched the sky,

Shouting — shouting — shouting —

And then day broke. There burst upon his sight
Strange houses set in unknown fields close by,
And he himself stood dwindling slowly down
Into a wearied middle-age. He gazed
Stupidly round him with a growing frown,
Shivering, and every second more amazed —
And then he blushed, for sudden sharp remembering
How he had danced and shouted on the Hills of Spring!

Charles Howard Marsh

To J——

When comes the day my eyes refuse to see
 The dew-wet yellow daffodils of Spring,
 The cherry snows and every living thing,
The springing grass, the sun-drenched blue of sea —
When they refuse, in dark obscurity,
 To see the rapture of a sun at rest
 Or golden stars hung in the primrose west —
Were you to pass at all regretfully

I think those earth-bound lips of mine would call
 The old familiar name in Love's own way,
 While night-dust slowly sifts through evening
 skies
And memory's fragrance like the dew would fall.
 My yearning, hungry soul would bid you stay
 That I might catch one tear from your sad eyes.

Virginia McCormick

Doubting

I cannot bear the spring this year,
The jonquils' golden rout,
And each cool purple crocus cup
Renews my poignant doubt.

Still it must be through doubt I live,
Doubt that you come no more,
Doubt that another year may find
Another golden store.

So I shall doubt through weary years
Till death bring my reprieve,
And from my dust a crocus bud
May carol, "I believe."

Alberta Bancroft

En Tour

A Song Sequence

I. The Gargoyle

Who carved that little gargoyle?
What is it doing there
In that little crooked Breton Street
That leads into the square?

Who placed it on that tiny house
To be peering down —
The only little gargoyle,
The lost little gargoyle,
Not another little gargoyle
In all that little town?

Who placed it on that Breton house,
Hunched underneath the eaves,
To be in hiding half the year
Behind the poplar leaves?
And oh, why did he put it there,
Leaning on the summer air?

* * *

I want to carve a gargoyle —
You ought to have one too.
I'd carve it on your little house

The way these Frenchmen do,
Close set beside your window
For company for you.

If I carved it very neatly,
Might it ever chance to be
You would lean out and look at it
And sometimes think of me?

II. Treasure

My trunk brought home the silken shawl,
The buckles and the hose;
My trunk brought home the etchings
And the lovely silken rose;
It brought the wrought-iron book-ends
And the gilded leather frame
And the little silver statue
Of the Faun without a name.

My heart, all weighted down with bliss,
Came home close-packed with lists, like this:—

“Black barges on the Danube;
The swallows over Rome;
The yellow walls of Avignon,
The stone steps and the Dom;

“The beach at Scheveningen;
The castles on the Rhine;
The china shop at Derby;
The English eglantine;

“The little squares at Venice;
The bookstalls by the Seine
And the happy flower markets
Along the Madeleine —”

It's day and night

And dusk and dawn
That list goes on
And on and on —

III. Genoa

And have you been to Genoa,
To Genoa, to Genoa,
Its shining marble palaces
In layers round the hills?
You've but to hear the name of it —
Oh, proud and lovely Genoa! —
To have it touch the heart of you
With glorifying thrills.

The little, crowded, crooked streets,
The endless stairs in Genoa,
The shipping and the harbors,
Both the old one and the new —
There's not a word about the ships
Crowding into Genoa
But you can safely listen to
And know that it is true.

* * *

I met the Flying Dutchman
Upon the streets of Genoa,
We chatted for a moment
Of the weather and the Horn;
And before we left — this happened once
In proud and shining Genoa —
He showed me a small picture
Of the place where he was born.

The Flying Dutchman, you could see,

Was quite at home in Genoa;
He said — and looking at him
I could scarce believe my eyes —
This was, he thought, the seventh time
He had put in to Genoa
To stock his little vessel
With a hundred years' supplies.

IV. *For Frances Ann*

The little shop near Père-la-Chaise
That held the little bed
That had two shelves — were they for books? —
Built straight across its head;
It was expressly made for you,
Expressly, Madame said—
Do you remember?

The little shop at Rochefort,
Just off the market place,
With the high stone steps where Madame sat
Forever making lace;
She made me buy a copybook
You said was a disgrace,
A little oilcloth book —
Do you remember?

The little shop at Croissic
With its window on the quay,
All crowded, full of Breton cups
Bepainted gaudily,
And the little ship we longed to buy
And couldn't; so we said
That just to please Madame we'd take
The little saint instead —
Do you remember?
Shut your eyes and think
And *please* remember.

V. The Exile

Lovelier than jewels,
Or gold or argentry
Is the little pitcher
I bought upon the quay,
The little pewter pitcher
That lived in Brittany.

I have it here beside me
Upon the kitchen shelf,
And it keeps forever whispering
And talking to itself:

“Concarneau and Croissic
And the clear, green seas;
And all the sails skimming in,
Canted in the breeze —”

Yes; I see them coming,
Yellow sails and blue,
Every rakish angle,
With the evening shining through,
Orange sail and raspberry
Sailing pert upon the sea.

Now, I'm asking what the kind
Of people these might be
Who make them sails of yellow
That steal the heart of me —
Sails of blue and yellow
That never had their fellow,

Of raspberry and orange,
To flaunt upon the sea?

But the little, sturdy pitcher
Answers not a word:
I doubt if it were listening
Or if it ever heard.

“Concarneau and Croissic,”
It whispers where it stands,
“Concarneau and Croissic
And the sweet, bare lands;
Concarneau and Croissic
And the long, long quay
And the steeple bells tolling
In the clear, green sea —”

Do I hear a ringing,
Silver, silver clear?
Do I see a spire arise
Out beyond the pier?
At any rate, I see a crowd
That’s lounging on the quays —
And might I then be asking
What style of folk are these
Who keep them phantom cities
Tolling in their seas?

But the little pitcher
Standing on my shelf
Never heeds the question,

But whispers to itself:

“Concarneau and Croissic
And the long, long quays
And all the sails slanting
On the clear, green seas —”

Doris Lucile Bradley

You Are Flame Thro' My Heart

You are flame thro' my heart, O Moon!
Your beauty descends upon me
And I am lost in its clear white fire.
Night, a silver Princess,
Lies dreaming in your palest garden;
Earth is bound by chains
That sway from your far jewelled wrists;
And I, beside the pool where scented roses nod,
Am divinely lost in your fire.

M. Rainsford Haines

Telegraph Operators

You sit like silent magicians.
From serpentine shining threads of silver
You draw, with implacable prophetic fingers,
Sentient secrets from out the dim laboratories
Of star-born destiny
Wherein man's fleeting life-spans are so torturously
wrought.

You sit like Chinese images;
But for all that you seem not to see,
You hear — your ears like tiny dynamos of vivid
perfectness
Are alive: They perceive the whispered agonies;
The psychic vibrations; the ebb and flow,
As mate calls to mate; as friend to friend
Cries out for succor from the engulfing darkness
Of relentless separations.

Over mountains and prairies;
Through the wind-tossed arms of moaning forests;
Over calm deserts dedicated to eternal beauty;
Indifferent to the assaults of revengeful thunderbolts;
Unscathed by the liquid fires of azure-hilted lightning
scimitars
That score the dark vaults of heaven with transient
gleaming frescoes;

Swifter than floating aerial ribbons — bridal wreaths
of the sky —
The winding pennants of the wild geese, drifting fog
banks,
And gossamer rifts of gauze-kissed clouds;
Outrunning the wind; out-distancing the multitudinous
shafts of fragrant rain;

They come — millions and millions of heart secrets —
Through unknown lanes of virginal air
Bordered by the maiden star-flowers of heaven
And guarded by the signal fires of Orion and of
Arabian-historied Algol!

Your ears touch and hold them —
Your listening fingers perceive them;
They quicken into material life
Under the influence of your pregnant magic; —
Hidden thoughts from the hidden hearts of unknown
men and women!
They achieve reality by the chemistry of your art;
In their long flight through the air they have been
made real!

Your mask-like faces are calm;
They commit no betrayals of your trust.
Only a shadow from the purple-fringed mantles of
mystery

Has cast a tiny cloud from its floating draperies
About your quiet eyes and touched your patient glance
with irony.

Maud Elfrid Uschold

Assignation

Not with the stars,
Far humming-birds of flame
Fanning the air with vertical wings
Not with the wind-washed sea;
Not on the hills of dawn
Where the lark of morning sings;
Not where crumpled moonlight
Sifts through an apricot tree;

In some forgotten land is the trysting-place,
With some forgotten dream
Or the never-known,
By phosphor light;
Where fading phantoms flee alone
And leaves drift through the night.

Leetha Journey Probst

Dawn Songs from the Uplands

Fading Stars

Dawn-stars veiled in mist
Are virgin tears once shed
For a faithless lover,
Or an old love dead.

The Lark

Drop your golden notes,
Vestal of the morning sky,
Perhaps I shall find them
Bye-and-bye.

The Spider Web

Amethyst and amber
Pearled in silver woof —
A fairy ran and left her scarf
Suspended from my roof.

The Squirrel

Deep within the shadows
Of a buckthorn tree,
Bright little eyes
Peer out at me.

Pine Trees

Dawn winds stir
In pine-tree tops,
And I remember
Soft rain-drops.

Fragrance

Sunshine palely golden,
Drawing fragrance sweet
From sage and manzanita
And wild buckwheat.

Dreams of Morning

Again and again to open my eyes
To the colors and sounds
Of the morning!
Through the branches of a gray pine
I see the dawn lift the night
From the Blue Ridge Mountains —
Between two curving breasts
Of the mountain where I lie watching —
A misty blur in the morning light,
The sun not yet risen over them —
The mist of sleep still upon them.
The wonder of the dawn!
With flame spreading
Along the dark line of the mountains
And the stars still shining!

Lighter than thistledown
The Blue Ridge Mountains
Hang in golden haze
Before the sun comes over them —
Unreal dreams
When my eyes first see them
Beyond the dark portals of my sleep
And the shadows of my awakening,

Star-dust still upon them!
Dreams come true!
Dreams of morning!

LeRoy McLeod

The Wall

What weird and strange things questing Youth is
taught!

Along the frontier of my world I thought
There bulked a giant gateless wall,
As long as life is, and as high
As heaven's own eternal sky. —
So was I told — and I believed it all.

Believed that wall for my protection stood;
Believed *my* guarded world held all the good;
Believed my god the only wise;
My custom's code, the all-just law!
Beyond the wall, in shrinking awe
I pictured chaos — ugly sin — and lies.

But came a time my ancient customs palled;
My soul within me languished, being walled
In like a cellar-yellowed sprout;
While wisdom of my god, I found
Was like a fog upon the ground,
Obscuring beauty — shutting all light out.

So intricate with nothings was my creed,
So prisoning my world, so great my need
For room to breathe and space to grow —
I hurled a challenge down the sky:

“Tear down the wall, or else will I
Alone contrive its instant overthrow!”

But when, all frantic with the rude delay,
I'd cleared the brush of little minds away —
 There stood . . no wall! — None anywhere! —
 Just crumbled ruins, splintered through
 With glass-blades sheathed in silver dew. . . .
And swift joy came and found me standing there.

Here loomed a world too big for petty thought!
Here Truth, disrobed of error fools had wrought,
 And cleansed of selfish creed's disease,
 Full-flowered in new beauty stirred.
 Here, wide-eyed Justice! . . Here I heard
Great God sing through kind hearts and tune-swept
 trees.

I. D. Perry

The Night Wind

When the leaves are blown

By the wind at night,

And fly in the air,

Or rustle in piles,

And the seeds are sown

By the pale moonlight

Where the fields lie bare

For rods and miles,

Spring will reveal where the wide-searching breeze

Scattered profusely such things as these.

Issue p. 201 · Scan p. 21

Ruth Clay Price

Eucalyptus Leaves

The wind of night
breathes
beneath the stars.
The sliver light
sheathes
bright scimitars.

Jo Hartman

Shelley in Our House

He meant to tune his lyre
Today and sing
In sweeping gusts of rhythm, to reach the heights
Of far Parnassus . . . verses that should bring
Him fame and gold, altho his heart's desire
Is all for Beauty — thro' the livelong nights
Its cadences are ringing in his ears
But, with his failing sight, the doctors say
He ought to do his writing in the day.

When Dawn came, pinkly silver . . . he
Glimpsed wisps of sun a-shimmering in the hall
And down along the inner wall
Of our house's little court — you see
His window fronts the fire escape,
Which he weaves into ancient battlements, whose dust
Becomes the “crumbling mould” of years . . .
Eyes glowing, collar half agape,
He flung his chestnut hair
Back from his brow, and snatched his pad and pen
With such an air
Of eagerness as mothers press
Their new-born babes to breast.

Just then —
Our landlord heard him stir —

“Who—who!” a loud voice called out. “Sure, you must
Come have your coffee, Shelley, soon,”
(That name maybe lured muses, for they were
So bountiful to one who bore it!) “’less
You want a headache!”

Some folks never rest
Till they inflict their favors, and old “Prune”
MacLean — he served them three times daily — was
this kind,
And yet no meddler, bless his cheery tongue!
How Shelley does hate eating at the table
When he is preening wings of his young mind
To dip in “amethyst of Eastern seas” —
Among
The lot of us none even able
To quote a *Sonnet from the Portuguese*!
But he sipped several swallows from his cup
Before he dashed up stairs.

For full an hour
He drove to capture lyric threads
His dreams had woven. He got “bright heads
Of orioles” and afterwards a flower,
“A sweet hibiscus-blossom” — “Tamarind trees
Caressed by soft lips of the desert breeze.”

By now blond Milly from the Tivoli,
In the next room, had tumbled out of bed.
Her cheap stage laugh
Cut quiveringly

Across his soul. What had he said
Last? "Breeze?" O God, that phonograph!
She set it going — Blues on Blues! —
He knew she must be shimmying to the shriek
Of blatant jazz. No decent Muse
Can stand Mill's "atmosphere," nor can poor Shelley
eke
Another word from all his golden store . . .
And this was like his yesterday, and day before!

Issue p. 203 · Scan p. 23

Anne Hendrickson

Silver Music

Sometimes I think
The Moon is a flute —
Its silver music
Blown about the garden
By an Elf.

Felis Domestica

Transmigration? Surely, yes!!
I can see in your light eyes,
Lives back — and not so many either, —
A little white and yellow cat
That came and snuggled her warm fur
Against my foot,
And when I stopped to stroke her
Purred and purred,
Till I was moved to lift her to my knee;
When suddenly, from out her satin paw,
Darted a claw
That dug deep into my arm.
With a grin she sprang away
To a safe distance —
There, sitting, blinking in the sun,
Watched the blood trickle from the wound
And licked her lips.

Beware of cats!

Beulah May

Animal

A dark lump in the dark
Hairy paws
Slipping behind a jalousie,
Stealing mangoes, —
Snuffing,
Munching,
Rustling,
Padding away in the night.

Jacques Le Clercq

Hai-Kai

I. Barnyard

Vainly the roosters seek to raise the darkness
By crowing. The hens sleep. When they awaken:
Dawn!

II. Party

He is a good host but lacks intelligence:
An intelligent man could certainly tell
Which of these three moons is the real one.

III. Episode

The cat crouches!
Fly, bird, fly
(Virgins are stupid!)

Moonrise

Breezes crest the wooded hill,
Running through the grass unseen —
Hounds invisible and still
Of Artemis, the Huntress Queen,
Coursing on some secret scent
Through the meadows of the night.
Now the stars, like daisies bent,
Dim before her silver flight.
Then against the pallid skies
O'er the hill-tops blackest ledge
Artemis with silver thighs
Leaps the forest like a hedge!

Our Younger Singers

Issue p. 206 · Scan p. 26

Elizabeth Painter

In Memoriam

She is not here to gladden our hearts
With bursts of song;
 With soft, warm winds;
 Memories; a sunset;
 A sky of blue — the blue of hyacinths;
 With milky clouds
 Like doves winging through it.
Yet in each haunting memory
We find the sweetness
Of a rose;
And like the rose,
The memory of its fragrance
Lingers when the bud is gone —
Lingers as do the misty stars
That never fade,
To return with wraith-like robes
About her, —
Madam April!

(Kern County Union High School Bakersfield, Calif.)

Homer G. Gane

Dawn

Fair-haired Dawn, the golden-slippered,
Tripped jauntily down the crystal pavements
To the skies;
While dark-haired Night,
Sable mantle flying to the winds,
Wearily climbed the steps of the Milky Way.

(Lincoln High School, Los Angeles)

A. G.

The Artistry of the Stanza

VII

What Is a Stanza?

The problem of definition in the realm of art is rarely an easy one. This is especially true in the case of forms like the stanza, with a long history in the past, and in the present a diversity of varieties that tend to shade off into allied forms belonging to other species. For our present purposes we may tentatively define the stanza as a group of lines so distinctive in their group-form that, on hearing them read, an auditor of poetic sensitiveness will get, in addition to the thought, a secondary and pleasurable impression that the author is following (or possibly is newly evolving) a line-combination pattern of primarily aesthetic values. As a rule, although not invariably, the author emphasizes this impression for the auditor by repeating, or at least approximating to, the pattern in closely succeeding lines.

This principle will enable us to distinguish between the stanza and the verse paragraph. In Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" the poem opens as follows:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur. — Once again.
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
 Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
 Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
 'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
 Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms.
 Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
 Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
 With some uncertain notice, as might seem
 Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
 Or of some hermit's cave, where by the fire
 The hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms
 Through a long absence, have not been to me
 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
 But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
 Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
 In hours of weariness, sensations sweet
 Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart; *etc.*

In this passage we have a succession of iambic pentameter lines, but the length of each group of such units is determined, like that of a prose paragraph, wholly by consideration of the nature of the thought in each. In the first group indicated above, the poet is describing the details of the scene then before him; in the second group (not here quoted in its entirety) he is discussing the effects that the memory of that scene have had upon his life in the years since he has seen it last. In other words, the principle of the division is *logical*, that is, it is based on the nature of the thought-content. So completely is this true that the break between the two quoted sections even splits a metrical line, coming after the third foot of an iambic pentameter and deferring the remaining two feet of the line to the next thought-group. A poem with its division based upon such purely logical considerations we fitly say is

divided into verse-paragraphs.

On the other hand, consider the opening lines of the same poet's "I wandered Lonely as a Cloud":

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

Here, judging by the ear only and without dependence upon the break apparent to the eye on the printed page, we feel keenly conscious of the presence of a six-line-combination unit that we may represent by the formula, *a4b4a4b4c4c4*, and that in the twelve-line passage quoted has been twice superimposed upon the subject-matter. There was no *logical* break at the end of the sixth line, since what follows merely adds further details to the description of the scene begun in the first stanza, and in prose would have been included in the same paragraph. The break results from the ending of an art-unit of expression. This *aesthetic* line-group unit superimposed upon the logical content, and subject, as we shall see, to all of the principles generally recognized as governing art-forms, we call a stanza.

Is rhyme an essential part of the modern English stanza? Theoretically, no. Practically, however, the presence of the co-ordinating and emphasizing element of rhyme, which arose in the Latin hymns of the early Middle Ages, is one of the most important points of structural difference between modern

European stanzas and the strophes of the Greek and the classical Latin. We may briefly glance at a few exceptional cases of the absence of stanzaic rhyme in modern English. First, there are a few unrhymed songs, notably the three introduced by Tennyson into the blank verse narrative of *The Princess*. I quote the opening of the first of these only, although study of all three would be illuminating.

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge,
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more. *Etc.*

Here, lacking the co-ordinating effect of rhyme to distinguish the lyrical blank verse stanzas from the narrative blank verse paragraphs surrounding them, Tennyson has been forced back upon the use of two other devices. First, he ends each of the five-line stanzas with a heavy refrain, "the days that are no more," unmistakably marking its conclusion. Second, in the latter of the quoted stanzas he binds the five lines together rhetorically, beginning the first line with "Fresh" and the third with "Sad", and combining the two in the "So sad, so fresh," that opens the concluding line of the stanza. Similar devices are used throughout the blank verse songs in *The Princess*, while in the songs similarly introduced into *The Idylls of the King* he adopts the rhyme that in the earlier poem he had endeavored to dispense with. In other words, in the lyrics of both poems he finds that he is unable to depend upon metrical effects only.

Again, we have the set imitations of the rhymeless classical strophes that have from time to time been attempted by modern poets. Of these possibly the best known are Tennyson's *Alcaics on Milton*.

O mighty-mouth'd inventor of harmonies,
O skill'd to sing of Time or Eternity,
God-gifted organ-voice of England,
Milton, a name to resound for ages;

Whose Titan angels, Gabriel, Abdiel,
Starr'd from Jehovah's gorgeous armouries,
Tower, as the deep-domed empyrean
Rings to the roar of angel onset — *Etc.*

These, interpreted by a reader with a knowledge of the original classical meter to a listener similarly equipped, have a stanzaic distinctiveness due to the metrical contrasts in the three types of line employed. Under ordinary conditions as to reader and auditor, however, they completely fail to meet our test.

Finally, we may cite the experimental unrhymed stanzas employed as a standard form by Collins throughout his "Ode to Evening."

If aught of oaten stop, or pastoral song,
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales;

O nymph reserved — while now the bright-haired sun
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed; *Etc.*

I have repeatedly tried reading these aloud to groups of persons of considerable experience in such matters and have invariably found such listeners unable, through the unaided ear (the supreme arbiter in matters of poetic form), to analyze

the stanzaic form employed. This poem well illustrates the general principle involved in Professor Saintsbury's statement*, made in a somewhat different connection, that "short lines, in combination with long ones, almost necessitate rhyme to punctuate and illuminate the divisions of symphonic effect."

In short, while we must recognize the theoretical possibility of the rhymeless stanza, practically we shall find that the various effects and functions of rhyme, or of that approximation to rhyme which we call assonance, will confront us at almost every step of our future discussion.

**Manual of English Prosody*, p. 317. It may be advisable to point out that both Professor Saintsbury in the words quoted, and the present writer throughout the above article, are referring only to the occurrence of rhyme in stanzas. This discussion has no bearing whatever upon the matter of free verse, which, grouped in verse paragraphs, obtains its effects by other and, when well used, equally legitimate methods.

COLOR by Countee Cullen. New York, Harpers, 1925.

Reading Countee Cullen's first volume of poetry, *Color*, which contains sonnets, love songs, epitaphs, light lyrics, and serious philosophy, should be a treasurable experience for anyone, whether he read in curiosity or in thoughtful quest. A little spotty in technique as well as unequal in appeal, the young negro poet's work has nevertheless great strength of emotional fervor and unique maturity of view, combined with a graceful rhythmic quality that is remarkably individual in spite of his echoes of other poets.

He is not merely the leading poet of his race, but one of the universal voices of new poetry. Certainly he strives first to interpret his people, their problems and their temperament; and he does it without the tinsel trappings of dialect, thus gaining reality for his thoughts and his facts, which, not being themselves superficial, do not require surface ornamentation. He can combine death with life, in one philosophic flash illuminate living racial character in the presence of the grave:

A Brown Girl Dead

With two white roses on her breasts,
White candles at head and feet,
Dark Madonna of the grave she rests;
Lord Death has found her sweet.

Her mother pawned her wedding ring
To lay her out in white;
She'd be so proud she'd dance and sing
To see herself tonight.

There is every race and no race in the following universal gesture, cadenced with shade and light:

If You Should Go

Love, leave me like the light,
The gently passing day;
We would not know, but for the night,
When it has slipped away.

Go quietly; a dream,
When done, should leave no trace
That it has lived, except a gleam
Across the dreamer's face.

He writes quite remarkably of Keats, of Conrad, of the "wisdom that cometh with the years," of atheism, of anarchy, of evolution. In fact, the last section of his book, called *Varia*, is given over to poems that might have come from a poet of any race.

For the down-trodden, Cullen feels especial sympathy: he sees inferiority of position as a part of the great universal plan. And so he writes of Simon the Cyrenian as having willingly borne the cross for his Master because he saw in the Master's face the sad light of a dream; and of Judas Iscariot his vision finds a little Jewish lad who grew to manhood along with the Christ, loving his Lord so much that he gladly accepted the scorn and hate of all the world as his part in the salvation of man. He makes an epitaph for the black Magdalens:

Ours the ancient story:
Delicate flowers of sin,
Lilies, arrayed in glory,
That would not oil nor spin.

In life they laugh readily, wrapping their wounds in pride,
although

They fare full ill since Christ forsook
The cross to mount a throne,
And Virtue still is stooping down
To cast the first hard stone.

Companion sketches of the man and the woman who cross the line show them in remarkable contrast: *she* reluctantly going, braving her gods, *he* riding out like a cavalier with clicking spurs; *he* returning with scornful backward glance and arrogant, mocking bow “to retraverse the line,” but *she* —

Calm as a wave without a crest,
Sorrow-proud and sorrow-wise,
With trouble sucking at her breast,
With tear disdainful eyes,

She slipped into her ancient place,
And, no word asked, gave none:
Only the silence in her face
Said seats were dear in the sun.

For the children of such vagrants there is this quatrain:

Ambiguous of race they stand
By one disowned, scorned of another,
Not knowing where to stretch a hand
And say, “My sister” or “My brother.”

You feel the utter sincerity of his emotion behind the tragic justice of his plea in *Pagan Prayer* that asks the retrieve of his race, and the same sincerity expressed in lighter key in the poem *Gods*. In *The Shroud of Color*, comparison of which with Millay’s *renascence* attests suggestion rather than resemblance, he describes his function as poet — his wish to match his dreams to truth. Personal grief has resolved itself into a humanized responsibility for his race.

The cries of all dark people near or far
Were billowed over me, a mighty surge
Of suffering in which my puny grief must merge

And lose itself.

Thus he gives himself answer to the query of the opening sonnet:

Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

As one reads, he grows into the feeling that Cullen is William Blake's little black boy, grown preternaturally old and wise with the wisdom of accrued years not his own, and that although in childhood he may have sung,

And I am black, but O my soul is white,

in vicarious maturity he has cast aside that individual cry, for the later spaciousness of his philosophy has endowed him with a gift of expression that is beyond racial locality and difference, and that permits him to write as any great poet only such things as a great negro poet could uniquely understand.

Lois Burton Moon