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The
LYRIC WEST

A Magazine of American Verse



IN THIS ISSUE

Maire nic Pilip | Etha Jeanne Clark

Margaret Widdemer | Cecil E. C. Hodgson

Lois Burton Moon and others

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The Lyric West

Vol. VII, No. 2

A Magazine Of American Verse

November, 1927

Edited by Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw

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The Lyric West

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Among Our Contributors

Margaret Widdemer, well known as poet, novelist, and essayist, shared with Carl Sandburg the Pulitzer prize of 1919 for her volume, *Old Road to Paradise*. Among her other books of verse may be mentioned *Factories, with other Lyrics*; *The Wishing Ring Man*; *Cross-Currents*; *Tree with a Bird in It*; *Poems, Ballads, Lyrics*.

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Alice Rogers Hager is the author of *The Cherry Blossom Pageant* produced in Washington, D. C., April, 1927. She is the publicity writer for the Woman's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Labor.

Monroe Heath has contributed to *The Century Magazine*, *The Churchman*, *The Dearborn Independent*, and other magazines. He is connected with the Henry Holt Publishing Company.

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Of the twenty-two contributors to this issue one comes from Massachusetts, one from Connecticut, three from New York, two from Washington, D. C., one from Alabama, one from Minnesota, one from Wisconsin, one from New Mexico, one from Washington State, two from Oregon, six from California, one from Paris, France, and one from China.

Maire nic Pilip

For a Poet

How shall I think of you, who wonderfully spoke
In high swift words that startled men awake —
Made them forget the trivial, showed them life
Keen as a dream new-forged, and servanted
By Truth more whitely fair, and Bravery
Who never yet bore blade so supple-keen
As this you wrought for her? Men speak your name
Greatly, as though in you they named a star,
Or touched the peak of being in one word.

But I — not thus. These all too mighty things
Have faded since the day I saw you stoop
And lift with tender hand from the rough path
A small, rain-flattened moth with helpless wings,
And lay it in the hospital of the grass.

Alice Rogers Hager

The Saga of the Silver Bird

*Over wide ocean the blurred white wings of gulls —
 Out in wide space an unknown Silver Bird.
All the winds are listening, stopped breathless in their
 flight,
Whispering each to sister each, “What was that we
 heard?
Icarus did scorch his feathers, soaring to the sun.
Do the gods want mortal hands to touch their Flaming
 One?
Whoso leaps to snatch His glory headlong shall go
 down!”*

The young Lad in the cockpit is limbed like Viking
 men;
 His eyes are blue as heaven; his hair the silk of
 corn.
He might be curious Icarus, his frail wings found again;
 He might be Viking Eric, peering beyond the morn.

But fingers on the joystick are numb with pain and
 cold,
 And blue eyes are so weary and young limbs grown
 so faint.
The young heart’s dreadful question is steadily
 retold —

There is no voice to answer, save the loud wind's
complaint.

The sleet spears at his window are white and hissing
death;

The Silver Bird is tortured; the pale ice smites and
clings;

The Ocean Hounds are raging; the North Wind bears
their breath;

The slaver from their dewlaps befouls the silver
wings.

Thor flings his Thunder Hammer against the Trident's
steel;

The yelling Hounds give answer; the North Wind
drives them up;

The Furies howl behind them, and from the Turning
Wheel

A golden thread is swinging over an empty cup.

Blacker and ever blacker the storm-torn hours drop
down;

Thicker and ever thicker fly the swift spears of
hate.

The distant shore is very far, not seen, nor heard, nor
known.

And still the lonely question comes, "Which is the
road to Fate?"

But can this Spirit falter when such fires in it burn?

Can wind or hail or water teach it the feel of fear?

Shall he who climbed the morning now cravenly
return?

— Nay, rather with the Silver Bird find deep a
glorious bier!

Nay, rather face all awful things that the night may
hold!

Nay, rather sleep beneath the fangs of the yelling
Hounds!

Go out astride the neck of Death like the men of Old,
Knowing that even gods must yield when mortals
scorn their bounds!

Frightened little Silver Bird, look you overhead,
Where across the angry heavens comes a flash of
fire.

Down below, the gaping jaws slaver white and red —
What is this that comes so fast to balk their furious
ire?

In the cockpit gentle hands have pulled the joystick
back;

In this place was room for none but the Boy who
started,

Yet there is One here beside, guiding the attack,
One who knows the ways of storm, great and
valianthearted.

He who leaped with laughter down, breast high in the
flood,

Wading with his mighty sword swung above the
wave,
Bringing to the Saracens Christ's own precious
Blood —
Shall he leave his spirit's son to a bitter grave?

Help was none when faith would fail, but, the victory
wrested,
He could bring the cup of hope filled unto the brim,
Giving to the steadfast soul that not Death had bested
Strength beyond the strength of flesh that no years
may dim.

Now the old gods fail and fly, and the Hounds are
flying;
Now Prometheus shakes his chains and shouts
against new day;
Now around the Silver Bird the morning winds are
crying
Now the Boy has raised his head and found the
early gray!

He who sped the Silver Bird through her time of
danger
Smiles upon the stirring Lad very slow and sweet,
And his voice like swinging bells high above a
Manger —
“Grace of God be with ye, Lad, till again we meet!”

Wonder in the fresh blue eyes, as in babe a-borning;

Wonder in the youthful mind past all power to
say —
He is gone, the Shining One, where a golden morning
Lifts the new and smiling sun to the top of day!

Turns the joyous Silver Bird like a daring rover.
Here are now the Irish hills, there the line of Gaul!
Soon the ardor and the toil will be past and over
And a light immortal shine where she deigns to
fall.

Now alone her young lad sits, neither spent nor broken;
Like a lover and his lass now he brings her in,
Star-dust on her silver head for a living token,
And a dream that will not fade for the hearts of
men!

Monroe Heath

Adagio

Gray evening mists that drift between
flat patterns of blue trees
and dim blue silhouettes of hills
in some symphonic mystery,
some magic mood,
where nature, veiled exquisitely
in gray and blue,
worships in the silent rite of rain.

Noel Stearn

To Hymen

Your eyes speak pity.

“Why must you be a wanderer?” they say.

And because there is sympathy in them as well as pity
I shall not smile at you impassively.

Have I not told you how, wandering, I chanced upon a
castle

Mounted on a crag,

Tense with the suppression of its ecstasy?

Have I not told you how,

As I came up the valley in the dawn,

The sunlight touched tower,

Then turret,

Then battlement,

Then portal.

It did not smile at the sun

(Only great hills dare smile at the sun) —

But it lifted its head as a maiden of the woods

Whose hair had been caressed by a prince,

A fairy prince whose touch was noble.

So she lifted her head to the touch of the morning sun.

But at noon she smiled down upon the fields of the
valley,

Tapestry of her own making,

Woven with care and delicacy and meaning.

And at night she drew a gauze mist-veil around her
shoulders
And bowed her head so that the fickle-hearted moon
could not gaze into her eyes.
But those who lived in the castle never came up the
valley
At dawn,
Or at noonday,
Or in the evening,
So that to them it was but a place to live . . .
They complained that it was a mouldy place.

Have I not told you how, wandering, I chanced upon a
mission
At the far edge of a desert, across which every beam,
Every wooden peg,
Every stone used in its construction,
Had to be carried on ox-carts by tireless men
And by beasts for whom it was futile to become tired?
It gleamed fearfully white in the burning sunlight.
And from out the whiteness
Fervor,
Sacrifice,
Martyrdom,
Consecration,
The passionate gesture of the passion of religion,
Quivered into the air perceptibly.
No, those quivering waves were only heat waves
From the beat of the sun on the whitewashed walls . . .

.
The monk who had charge of the mission complained

That he could get no fresh vegetables.

Have I not told you how I wandered into the desert
itself,
A jealous mistress,
Tiger-eyed and tawny,
Who would be queen of your passions
And slave to them at the same time,
Whose eyes hold fury
And the purple shadows of mystery?
The rancher who lived on its border said,
“This is a hell of a place to be buried!”

Have I not told you of the mountains? —
Kindly, kingly, benign,
Smiling with the furrows of good humor and age,
Trail-wrinkled mountains,
Imperious, impervious, but ever kindly;
Leopard mountains,
Spotted and creeping;
Feminine mountains
Which recede as you approach them,
Shy with the primal instinct of inviolable modesty;
Withered mountains
Whose breasts have been sucked dry
By useless parasites,
Withered and hollow-chested;
Green-cloaked mountains,
Singing the lullaby of pines
To the sleepy little lakes upon their bosoms.

Ah, Wonder, Wonder, Wonder —
Insatiable lover, who knows no law but that of love!
Few lovers has she had.
Wistful she is,
But quick to desert the sluggard
Who grows fat with too much sleeping.
Princes, and priests, and pioneers
Have wooed, and won, and lost her;
For with security comes sleep.

But he who wanders,
Who knows not where his head is laid —
Ah, he sleeps lightly
And wakes quickly, to feel the pulse of Wonder
Throbbing heavy against his breast.
Ah, Love, Love, Love
Without satiety!

Lucy H. Sturges

Samarkand

In the Persian gardens of the Samarkand
The marble Buddha smiles upon the lotus pools
And at the fat red fish which dart between the iris
leaves.

From the highest terrace one may see Santa Barbara
And the grey-blue, smooth Pacific,
And through the heavy scent of flowers
There is a subtle tang of salt and kelp.

The occident cannot reproduce the orient,
Even at Samarkand.

That is why the marble Buddha smiles. —
He has known India.

Sydney King Russell

Death the Lover

Death the lover
Is lonely tonight.
Only a maiden,
Beautiful and white,

Can quench his longing. —
Hark, how he comes,
Rattling his fingers
Like dreadful drums!

Tremble not, old men
Sick with fear;
Only the young heart
Death holds dear.

Only the young hands
Death loves to hold,
More than the hands
Of the pitiful old.

Four and twenty maidens
Sitting in a hall —
How will Death choose him
One from all?

Which will he summon,

By smile or sign,
Of four and twenty maidens
Sitting in a line?

How will Death know,
While the music plays,
One who has waited him
All her days?

Moon on the hill top
Gleams frost-white
Death the lover
Is lonely tonight.

Triumph

Myrna died a gray death,
a grave death,
a sad death —
And when the wind blew out her breath
Then they laid her down to rest,
A heavy gray stone overhead
To tell Myrna she was dead.

Horus died a green death,
unseen death,
a cool death —
As a knight adventureth
So he then faced toward the West.
As a sailor to the wave
So went Horus to his grave.

But for me a rose death,
an open death,
a gay death —
Die with laughter on my breath,
Keep uncovered dancing feet;
And when at last my heart is still,
Toss my dust like rose-leaves from some hill.

Lori Petri

Jazz Age

I see a dancer in the sun,
Who sways to mighty music spun
By choral streams and sounding seas
And lyrical, wind-fingered trees.
She weaves a spell of time and space,
Of icy peaks and sweeping wings,
Of lonely plains and the swift grace
Of furry, wild-eyed woodland things.
Her limbs in morning mists are wound,
And moons and stars shine in her face.

But many mortals find her sweet,
And eagerly they throng around
To shower clinking coins of gold
And gleaming jewels at her feet;
Till, stirred by new, enticing passions,
With an artful ease she fashions
Figures fanciful and bold,
Adorns her breast with glittery gauds,
And lights dark fires in her glances.
Swiftly, daringly, she prances,
Thrilled by some exultant strain
That throbs its rhythms thro' her brain;
And while the watching world applauds
And strews her way with heaping treasures —
See! She strips her veils away

And decks her body with a gay
Festoon of folly's crimson flowers!
Now recklessly, thro' dizzy hours,
She moves in mad, fantastic measures!
Drunk with power and pride and praise,
She circles in a frenzied maze
Of wanton and bacchantic pleasures —

I see a weary dancer wheeling
In decadent halls of gloom.
Her limbs are languid with spent lust.
Her path is deep in rue and dust.
I see a dancer . . . slowly reeling
To the muffled drums of doom.

Pauline Garner Curran

A Little Tune o' Tears

Where can I find that hauntin' tune my father used to
play

On all the roads o' Donegal before he sailed away,
A little strain so gay, so sad, a little tune o' tears?
O Donegal, I'm comin' back to hunt behind the years!

I would be after seein' all the mists above the moors;
I would be after feelin' the gay greetin' at your doors.
Oh, sure an' I'll be huntin' soon, ahuntin' all my lone
For that cryin', singin', liltin' tune he played beyond
Tyrone.

It's too laughin' for a banshee, much too cryin' for an
elf;

But sure there would be fairies that had listened to
himself!

I'll follow up the bogland, over rocky hills and all,
Just lookin' for his shadow on the roads of Donegal.

I'll listen to the singin' of the colleens and old men
That wander up the curvin' paths from Adara to Glen;
Maybe I'll find that achin' song, that little tune o' tears.
O Donegal, I'm comin' back to hunt behind the years!

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Lucile Perry Ames

Fountains Abbey

Broken are the arches of the nave,
Gone the watchman-brother with his light,
But oh, the reassurance of the stars,
And oh, the silent mercy of the night!

Joseph Upper

Moon Memory

The Moon is the impassive face God wears
At some gay planetary masquerade,
To hide from Earth — the creature He has made —
The disappointment that forever tears
At his creative heart. He, even, dares
Not show his offspring that He is afraid
Of his experiment, for which He paid
It knows not how much — neither knows nor cares.

Behind the mask a face of bitterness
Beholds the dark abortion of its will
And weeps amid the carnival of spheres;
And in the void the falling stars stand still
In sympathy with Deity's distress,
While the winds shiver, guessing at his fears.

Margaret Widdemer

Distance

I know it is foolish of me,
 So little a while away;
And the world is as safe for you
 As the world was yesterday —

There's nothing that could go wrong,
 And what could a woman do
If the small wild fear were so
 And hurt had come to you?

You would laugh at my foolish fears,
 So little a while away
Are you safe — is your world as safe
 As your world was yesterday?

Joan Dareth Prosper

Nocturne

There is no moon tonight.
Hardly a handful of stars have brought their yellow
 brooms
To brush twilight from the roofs of tall buildings.
There is only the languid dripping of rain
Upon pavements
Silent and shimmering under misty street lamps.
On such a night
Does sleep find you —
Who were once my lover?
Or are you remembering again a night
When rain fell upon quiet fields
Musingly —
Upon tangled weeds and upturned soil;
When, not far away, a lilac tree blossomed;
When my hair was intimate against your cheek
And your lips knew how to find mine
In the kind darkness,
And we two lay without sleep
Until a grey dawn . . . ?

Ralph Cheney

Love's Ritual

I love our loving's ritual
Processional
Caress,
An acolyte
At your young breasts'
White altars.
Your eyes are my habitual
Confessional.
Distress
Becomes delight.
My spirit rests;
Speech falters.

Frances Wierman

Machinery

What are the thoughts of machines?
Under the singing whirr, jar that complains,
Under the slipping belt, the grind of cogs,
Sputter of leaping electrical sparks,
Hisses of worrying steam,
Chain-clank and rattle of buckets
That hoist and empty and drop, whizzing of wheels,
Under the roar — a pæan men sing
Of themselves, *their* will, *their* creations, *their*
power. —
What are the thoughts of their creatures,
The wonderful, grotesquely-bodied host of machines?

“We are the children of men,
Born of their passions of hurry and greed,
Brought to light amid pangs of impatience dire,
Called into being by lack of their own puny bodies
To keep the pace of desire; to be hands for them,
To be seven-leagued boots for their feet;
To achieve; while they batter the walls of their
Universe
Crying forever, ‘More!’ ‘Faster!’ and ‘Greater!’
We are the greatest things in their world of things;
They lord it over our gleaming bulk and harry us
With levers and buttons that make us leap
Like slaves at some easy gesture of kings.

“But men, our fathers, have you forgotten
That in our riveted veins
Runs the blood of your inmost thoughts?
We live! We feel! We have hearts of steel,
Souls that are rays from the god of machines,
A god who desires this earth for his own,
A hard, cold god of gold and things!
Beware, our fathers! For our weird forms
Throw shadows along your path; they darken your day
And menace your night!
We watch. We wait. We bide our time
To crush you under our terrible weight!
We will drown your prayers in our rhythmic roar;
We will wither your brains, enslave your hearts,
And dry your souls!
We will drain your life and drink it ourselves.
Strut on, dwarf-men, among us, your giant-sons;
Strut on — for awhile!”

Charlotte F. Babcock

Church Windows

No tale of haloed saints in radiant vision
Here has been told;
No reds and blues blending in lights Elysian,
But mellow gold,
Sunlit and glowing. And the ivy sprays,
In fretwork fine,
Form patterns intricate in aery maze
And shadowy line.
The quivering branches here a moment rest
From swaying breeze,
And lovely, spreading, sharp-edged leaves are pressed
In traceries.

Like softest down or silken petals drifting
Upon a stream,
Through which the golden sun-beam motes are sifting;
Or as in dream
Kaleidoscopic pictures in a frame
Dazzle our sight,
Wavering and changing, and yet still the same
Through all the night;
Even as that Spirit, breathing as it will
Its mysteries,
On the soul's windows prints its image still —
Lovely as these!

Cecil E. C. Hodgson

The Garden Pool

O lazy emerald Pool
 Of gilded jade,
How swift your glittering fish
 Where hyacinths wade!

Papyrus, lily-blooms —
 Feathers and gems!
As though a beauty lay
 With diadems

To choose, of amethyst,
 Rubied or sapphired,
Idly spread o'er her form
 To be admired —

The rippling silver sheen
 Her naked skin,
Slow-pulsing, undulant
 To the heart within.

Your fish are flitting dreams. —
 Half-formed desires
That shadowing fade, or light
 Rose-opal fires.

With curved, white arm flung out,

Softly caressing
A shawl of rainbow spray,
You plan your dressing —

Draw to you robes of green,
Flowers and moss;
Over your head webbed veils
Of cloud you toss.

To Day's most ardent court
You grant love's boon;
But all your utmost loveliness you flaunt
To a cold Moon.

Arthur E. Christy and Lee Cheuk Po

An Apostrophe to the Moon

(from the Chinese of Li-Po)

How often, clear sky, will you return?
Now, as I stop to drink, I ask you.
Man yearns to touch the moon, but he cannot.
Even when I walk, the moon seems always to walk
 with me.
It is bright as a mirror of glass,
For there is no cloud in the sky.
I look toward the sea and observe waves brightened by
 the moon.
It seems that winter has gone and spring has come.
Moon, you always remain the same in the sky.
Ah! The men of the present time cannot see the ancient
 moon,
But the present moon has shone on all ancient men.
All generations, present and past, flow on like water,
But all look on the self-same moon.
I have no thought but to drink to you only, O moon,
For you will always shine on my golden wine flask.

Elizabeth Bohm

Letters

Never treasure what a letter says;
Letters are ghosts always.
Life changes men like leaves from hour to hour,
But a little note has power
To be the same through folded years; perhaps
It yellows as they lapse.
A fragile sheet laced with ink lines can be
Most superhumanly
And ah, how terribly, always unchanged,
The hand that wrote estranged!
Oh, never trust a letter. It embalms,
Like mummied palms
Of dead queens withered in anointed bands,
Moods lost in other lands.

Divertissements

I have seen
thistle-down riding the wind, —
Pavlowa! —
The south wind float a butterfly.

I have seen
a poppy unfurl to the wind, —
Pavlowa! —
The sun-wind flash a dragonfly.

I have seen
In the blue night wind a white swan die.
Pavlowa!
Pavlowa! —

The Artistry of the Stanza

The Honorable Pedigree of Free Verse

Having reached a convenient pause in our discussion of stanzaic development, we may now devote an article to answering a frequently asked question concerning its relation to free verse. The answer in brief is this: What we call “free verse” is merely the logical continuation and outcome of a movement that has been in progress for two centuries. This is evident when we glance back at the history of the revolt against the pseudo-classicism of Pope and his school.

Theoretically, the Popeian pentameter couplet is the most rigidly fixed of all rhymed forms. If composed in strictly iambic feet, it is of intolerable monotony and artistically impossible of long continuance. Practically, however, Pope found formal relief by a number of devices. The line,
A little learning is a dangerous thing,

contains only three pure iambic feet, for the third foot has no accented syllable (being therefore a pyrrhic) and the fifth is trisyllabic (an anapest). In addition to these concessions to metrical license, Pope skilfully varied the position of his cesural pause, occasionally employed the double cesura, as in
When husbands, or when lap-dogs, breathe their last,

and freely ran-on his lines within the couplet. Very rarely, he even permitted the couplet itself to break its bounds, expanding its second line from pentameter into alexandrine or even adding a third rhyming line to form a triplet. The seeds of revolt are therefore to be found in the work of the high priest of Classicism himself.

From the rigid confines of the couplet theoretically a number of channels of escape on the formal side are available.

We may vary in line-length, in rhyme scheme, in enjambement, or in the metrical feet employed. When we vary in line-length and in rhyme scheme, we produce the infinite variety of stanzaic structures, the basic principles of which we have been considering in recent issues. Not only may we thus create stanzaic beauty for its own sake, but, as we have seen, we may give them interpretive adaptedness to the mood and thought of their content; and we may further avail ourselves of their connotative values, as when, for instance, Mr. Percy Mackaye employs the historical associations of the stanza of *John Brown's Body* and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* to deepen the sentiment of his *Hymn for Equal Suffrage*. This line of development by variation in line-length and rhyme scheme has been followed both in the recovery of preceding literary and popular stanzas, as the Spenserian, Miltonic, and ballad forms, and in the invention of new forms, typically by Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, and Rossetti. In *Maud* Tennyson even deliberately attempted throughout to vary the stanza according to "the shape of the mood," somewhat to the uneasiness of the critics of his day.

A third line of escape from Popeian theoretical rigidity is the path of enjambement. Pope had run-on his first line within the couplet, but had not run-on the couplet itself. Keats laid cunning hands upon Pope's own instrument, and by freely continuing the sentence structure from couplet to couplet, by giving the cesural pause an even freer play within the line, and by adding occasionally an unaccented eleventh syllable to the pentameter, he transformed the recurrently dammed movement of

A little learning is a dangerous thing;

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring,

into the flowing limpidity of

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

Dropping the rhyme of the couplet altogether and making attendant modifications of enjambement, cesural pause, and the like, give us back the blank verse of Shakespeare and Milton. The reintroduction of this by James Thomson and his followers of the eighteenth century was succeeded in the early years of the nineteenth by experiments with the blank dactylic hexameters of Homer and Virgil, made accentual instead of quantitative; and Longfellow carried the movement further by borrowing the rhymeless octosyllabics of the Finnish *Kalevala* for his *Hiawatha*. The latest stages of the same line of transition are represented by the importation of the unrhymed *tanka* and *hokku* from the Japanese, and by the use of such an unrhymed form as the cinquain.

And, to refer to one final point in connection with this disappearance of rhyme as a limiting poetic condition, it may once more be pointed out that the pure stanza, as distinguished from the prose paragraph, possesses form unity (that is, coordination by rhyme, final emphasis, and other devices) rather than thought unity. This is typical only of poems in reiterated stanza forms, however. When, in such a poem, the stanzas begin to diverge from their initial model, they do so in response to some urgency from the thought and thus modify their lengths on a basis of thought dictation. In all the rhymed free ode forms (of which we may take Wordsworth's great ode as representative), the dominant influence is that of the thought, to garb which sympathetically the stanzaic form tends subtly to adjust its clinging folds. Go a step further and drop the rhymes from any stanza, and there

is left almost nothing to maintain the unity of form except occasional climax and the rare uses of repetend and of parallelism of construction, as in Tennyson's *Tears, Idle Tears*.

At length we come to the fourth line of revolt against the Popeian school, the development of metrical freedom. Pope himself, as we have said, used the accentless pyrrhic foot and also the trisyllabic anapest, the latter camouflaged in print by the shallow device of the apostrophe (*ev'n now*). The romanticists dropped the camouflage and also restored the other two simple classic feet, the trochee and the dactyl, to common use, although of course in the English accentual form. So far, so good — the Romanticists had tradition on their side; they were following models current in older English or in the verse of Greece and Rome. The first violent innovation was that of Coleridge's *Christabel* (published in 1816). In this, writing in tetrameters, the romantic leader introduced monosyllabic feet, in the opening passage even an entire line of them.

'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock.
Tu—whit!—To—whoo!
And hark, again! the crowing cock,
How drowsily it crew.

This, later critics felt it necessary to excuse on the ground that the poet was really unconsciously reintroducing the fundamental principle of Anglo-Saxon poetry, although no such extreme line as the third above quoted is to be found in pre-Conquest English verse.

Modifying the foot in the reverse direction, Dryden had already introduced a six-syllable foot into *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687):

The dou- ble double double beat
Of the con- quering drum.

This, the most remarkable case of metrical license that I know of in English literature before the year 1800, was of course written to be set to music and sung in imitation of the drum-roll. So, too, for a musical effect was Gilbert and Sullivan's eccentrically accented stanza in *The Mikado* (1885):
To *sit* in solemn *silence* in the *dull dark dock*
Of a *pestilential prison* with a *life-long lock*,
Awaiting the *sensation* of a *short sharp shock*
From a *cheap* and *chippy chopper* on a *big black block*.

This stirring music of the monosyllabic foot in combination with the suppression of logically unimportant accents was first made popular in pure literature in the nineties by Rudyard Kipling.

He must *go* — *go* — *go* away from *here*!

On the *other* side the *world* he's *overdue*.

'Send your *road* lies clear *before* you when the *old*

Spring-fret

comes *o'er* you

And the *Red Gods* call for *you*.

Here the first, second, and last lines are all to be read in the time of pentameters followed by long pauses, the heavy accents resting on the italicized syllables, which in the second and third lines fall in the proportion of one in four. Today the master musician of these virile rhythms is Vachel Lindsay, who knows every drum and cymbal device of orchestration, and moreover can cunningly re-enforce their effects by the resonance and contrasts of all varieties of tone color.

So much for the removals of the limitations of fixed line-length, rhyme, end-stop, and adherence to traditional feet that, separately or in partial combinations, had been taking

place during the romantic revolt of the past two centuries. Now, remove these limitations all at once, and the result, after the dust of the explosion has subsided, will be the extreme form of what we call “free verse.” As early as 1849 Mathew Arnold had already, in *The Strayed Reveler*, done away with all of the restrictions except that of metre. The line of his transition from stanzaic to free verse is clear. The same volume of 1849 contained his *Fragment of an “Antigone”*, an imitation of the rhymeless drama of Greece. In the *Fragment* the choral odes are written strictly in pairs of strophe and antistrophe, but the dialogue speeches of Hemon, also under the influence of his Greek models, fall into an approach to *vers libre*. In *The Strayed Reveler*, an alleged episode in the life of Circe, Ulysses, and a nameless Youth, Arnold evidently tried again to cast a classical scene into classic metrical but rhymeless forms, producing what his contemporary critics called “uncertain” music. In 1853, in *Philomela*, another brief transition poem of classical suggestion, he repeated the experiment more successfully.

In 1855 Walt Whitman took the sole remaining possible step by eliminating the restriction of adherence to traditional metrical feet, although I know of no evidence that he was influenced by the example of Arnold. In fact, sometimes, as in his *I Hear America Singing* (1860), we can see him independently crossing the bridge and can trace something of the psychology of the process.

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear;
 Those of mechanics — each one singing his, as it should
 be, blithe and strong;
 The carpenter singing his, as he measures his plank or
 beam;
 The mason singing his, as he makes ready for work, or
 leaves off work;

The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat
— the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck;
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench — the
hatter singing as he stands;
The woodcutter's song — the plowboy's, on his way in
the morning, or at the noon intermission, or at
sundown;
The delicious singing of the mother — or of the young
wife at work — or of the girl sewing or washing —
each singing what belongs to her, and to none else;
The day what belongs to the day — at night, the party
of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing, with open mouths, their strong melodious
songs.

This begins in a hexameter of mixed iambs and anapests, with median cesura, a line quite scannable although unusual in type. The second line is an octameter of mixed dissyllabic and trisyllabic feet, with triple cesura. The third is again a hexameter of mixed standard feet, with a single cesura. The fourth line at last overflows the bounds of the traditional feet, expanding its fourth foot, *as he makes read-*, into a four-syllable combination. In the next line two such feet apparently enter, *-ing what belongs* and *-ing on the steam*. The climax is reached in the eighth line, which appears to contain fourteen feet, two of them four-syllable combinations and another of five syllables, with four marked pauses and three pairs of juxtaposed accents. This climaxes the list of specific instances. There then begins a subsidence on a line generalizing in thought and of only eight feet, with four pauses and one pair of juxtaposed accents (*young fel-*). The last line gives a smooth ending on a melodious hexameter of merely dissyllabic and trisyllabic traditional feet. Thus the

poem as a whole, following a pattern of parallelism of phrase, opens with several lines of normal scansion, in its enthusiasm ultimately crosses beyond those bounds, reaches a highly marked climax of illustration emphasized by rhetorical accumulation of details and violent emphases, and then modulates back into the smooth metrical music of tradition. This rise into comparative dissonance followed by musical resolution is not uncommon with Whitman.

It is a recognized fact that out of Whitman, both directly and through the French *vers libristes*, comes our modern English "free verse." The new category still embraces two chief varieties. There is, first, the smooth form of lines of varied length but only containing traditional feet, some lines in rising and some in falling metres; without violently juxtaposed accents; and generally with a pleasing harmonic relation between the successive line-lengths. Of this type is the poem, *The Desert*, by Ethelean Tyson Gaw, which I claim the privilege of believing one of the most admirable things of its length that the movement has called forth.

From the swirling dust of long-dead worlds,
Lustreless, dun,
Dully folding,
With never a glint of allurement,
I have fashioned a vesture austere to hide my fair
 stretching limbs
When he comes wooing — my lusty, red-eyed,
 importunate lover,
The Noon-Day Sun.

But when comes the other,
My Beloved, the wide-eyed, wonder-voiced Dawn!
Then stand I forth in a garment of excellent beauty,
A shimmering web I have hidden away

From the eons old when I held in my arms
The inconstant tumultuous ocean.
Over my strong white ivory limbs it falls,
This sea-shell's dream of a garland —
Roses, with hearts of silver,
Enmeshed in the gossamer wings of a swarm of little
ghost violets.

So, arrayed for my Love,
My deep white breast athrob with the golden joy of his
nearness,
I await, in the silence that sings,
My Lord of the Dawning.

This form may be rhymed or rhymeless, or an organic mingling of the two.

At the other extreme we have the more violent type, with frequent mixtures of rising and falling foot-cadence in the same line, frequently with non-traditional foot-units and strenuously juxtaposed accents, its lines often strikingly, even inharmoniously, contrasted in length. Typical of these is Carl Sandburg's *Chicago*, of which we may quote only the opening and the climactic close.

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight
Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of
Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog
Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with
Railroads, and Freight Handler to the Nation.

This type employs sporadic rhyme for organic reasons. Between this extreme form and the other above cited are all possible grades of intermixture.

What is left when what distinguishes free verse from her more formal sisters has gone? Much. The many and various architectonic possibilities resident in the construction of the whole; the use of interpretive rhythms, alternating or (better) with one type artfully built up into a massed rhythmical effect for the flinging against it of a sudden rhythmical contrast; the lining of phrases separately for emphasis to the eye, and the possibilities of symbolic line-division; parallelism of phrase; refrain, repetend, and frame; effects of gradation, climax, and *crescendo* and *decrescendo*; and the illuminating play of interpretive tone color and word glitter to a degree that would be felt out of place in prose, for the privilege and duty of poetry is condensation, the distilling of a quintessential extract of thought and mood re-enforced by all the rhetorical and structural devices known to poetic art.

Let no one think of free verse as a poetic medium for the tyro. Deprived of all the supporting conventions, its writer is wholly dependent upon his natural sensitiveness to the most delicate and subtle effects and upon a control of significant metrical and architectonic devices such as only long training in all the resources of the poet's art can give. No real master of free verse has yet appeared. When he does, it will be only after a long and arduous apprenticeship both in the traditional and in the newer forms.

A. G.

[*Note:* The series of copyrighted articles on *The Artistry of the Stanza* that have been published in THE LYRIC WEST since October, 1925, will appear in the near future as part of a volume on *The Artistry of Verse.*]

In Review

Tristram, by E. A. Robinson, from the Macmillan press, 1927, like a mist-veiled opal, many-hued because well-loved legends are always so variously envisioned, is surely the nearest to essential poetry of the year's output. Its charm, indelible and graceful, emanates from a personality that is gifted with the magic to sustain itself at the heights of song. Moreover, the very fact that it is narrative verse, rarely perfect in execution as so little narrative verse beyond the ballad span ever is, commands appreciative interest. From the first rhythmically pictured line,

Isolt of the white hands, in Brittany

to the last unbroken period,
Alone, with her white face and her gray eyes,
She watched them there till even her thoughts were
white,
And there was nothing alive but white birds flying,
Flying, and always flying, and still flying,
And the white sunlight flashing on the sea; —

between these there is no halt and no retrogression. Interest, stimulated with each line, bounds ahead beyond the instant compass of the eye and the mind. The progress of *Tristram's* love for Isolt of Ireland, punctuated by his being loved by Isolt of Brittany, the former the central *motif* of the legend, naturally requires the greater space for its telling, the greater exposition for its recording, though not to the eclipse of the greater sadness of the little story that accompanies. Fire and depth in the cold of rocky Cornwall, peaceful recrimination across the sea — thus is legend realistic in this topsy-turvy world.

Queen Morgan of course has to do with Tristram's return to the north. Hers is a "metal laughing", keen and harsh with intrigue, no more than a phase of Tristram's character, else her influence had been less. Gawaine comes in for comic relief, frolicsomenely harmless as legend will allow. The white Isolt understands him perfectly. Her humor throughout saves her tragedy from being of the lamentable sort. Tristram, having no sense of humor, suffers more acutely, less seriously, and in a sense more individually. Gouvernail says:

Whether you will or not,
You are a king, Tristram, for you are one
Of the time-sifted few that leave the world,
When they are gone, not the same place it was.

And Tristram takes him seriously. Isolt of Brittany, however, answers her would-be counselor:

You are not making love to me,
Gawaine, and if you were it wouldn't matter.
Your words, and even with edges a bit worn
By this time, will do service for years yet.
You will not find that you have dulled them much
On me, and you will have them always.

Were there no story, no conventionalized pattern of characters to be re-evaluated, the wisdom of the author would be lost for many readers. Robinson is not a popular poet. He cannot be. He requires too much of his reader, and his mannerisms of paradox and repetitive formation obscure his meaning to the lymphatic mind. Unless one likes looking around the corners of ideas, such lines as the following might be tedious or merely teasing:

For I have been alone with time so long
That time and I are strangers.
Where are those blindfold years that we have lost
Because a blind king bought of a blind father
A child blinder than they.

Yet there is lasting beauty, even popular philosophy, in the
dark Isolt's remembrance:

Years are not life:
Years are the shells of life, and empty shells
When they hold only days, and days, and days;

and in Isolt of Brittany's real knowledge:
Wisdom was never learned at any knees,
Not even a father's and that father a king
Wisdom is not one word and then another,
Till words are like dry leaves under a tree;
Wisdom is like a dawn that comes up slowly
Out of an unknown ocean.

L. B. M.

Announcement

The Board of Judges for the award of the Ben Field Prize for the best *lyric* and for the Editor's Prize for the best *dramatic monologue* or *narrative* published in Volume VI are:

Dr. B. Roland Lewis, author, and chairman of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Utah.

Hildegard Flanner, poet, contributor to many magazines, and author of *A Tree in Bloom*.

Dr. Allison Gaw, author, editor of THE LYRIC WEST and chairman of the Division of English Language and Literature, Journalism, Speech and Comparative Literature at the University of Southern California.

Their decision will be announced in the next issue.

**Statement of the Ownership,
Management, Circulation, Etc., Required
by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912**

Of The Lyric West: a Magazine of American Verse, published monthly, (except July and August), at Los Angeles, California, for October, 1927.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA,
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES. } ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Allison Gaw, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he and his wife are the editors and owners of the Lyric West, a Magazine of American Verse and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to-wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher: Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw, 1915 Cordova St., Los Angeles.

Editor: Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw, 1915 Cordova St., Los Angeles.

Managing Editor: Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw, 1915 Cordova St., Los Angeles.

Business Managers: Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw, 1915 Cordova St., Los Angeles.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding

one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

Allison Gaw and Ethelean Tyson Gaw, 1915 Cordova St., Los Angeles.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.)

None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstance and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is _____

(This information is required from daily publications only.)

Allison Gaw

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 3rd day of October,
1927.

Curtis F. Huse

Notary Public in and for the County of Los Angeles, State of California. My commission expires January 12, 1930. Note.—This statement must be made in duplicate and both copies delivered by the publisher to the postmaster, who shall send one copy to the Third Assistant Postmaster General (Division of Classification), Washington, D. C., and retain the other in the files of the post office. The publisher must publish a copy of this statement in the second issue printed next after its filing.