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THE POETRY SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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NO TEARS TO SWELL THE RIVER

Fay Strawn Campbell

Wang Chi, your march was halted
While I cut the bamboo.
I heard the muted drum-beats;
A wild bird's haunting cry.
I crouch beside the bamboo;
Strip with tense hands the bamboo.
I do not see the river
Beneath a brassy sky.

I feel its tide flow deeply.
I have no tears to swell it.
It flows through brakes of bamboo.
A ghost floats gently by
In a dead white sampan,
Down a crimsoned river . . .
Swelled with blood the river.
Above, the vultures fly.

Once more, I walk through bamboo.
Again, I cut the bamboo.
I see gaunt spirits marching
Out from the morning sky.
Their steps no longer echo
With the drum-beat's rhythm.
The water flows forever
Where the banks are high.

THE TARGET

Grover I. Jacoby, Jr.

Far under great trees,
 Sunk in their shade,
Deep in their stillness,
 This thought will invade
Me, and hurt me, take harsh
Hold of my breath:
These trees live so long,
For their lives are like death.

All things live longer
If they stand still.
Death aims his arrows
At the bright will.

MISS FIFILIE, OUR CAT

Cecil E. C. Hodgson

With sure and stately tread she passes by—
A satin shadow ruffling velvet night;
Mistress of sound; immune to casual sight.
Beyond the flicker of her emerald eye,
Unlit, the watchful deeps of silence lie.
Through whisker-aerials, pulse of rodent-fright
Impels her—arrow-swift, on instant flight—
Then silence shatters on a strangled cry.

Claws sheathed, on indolent motion softly borne,
Our innocent Miss Fifi appears,
Arches her back to stroking hands, and nears
The wonted hearth; while, warm within her, torn
By ruthless torture ere its breath was shorn,
A hapless mouse has quelled her hunger-fears.

RHYME OF THE RAGMAN

Lillian J. Zellhoefer

Oh, I shall sleep late upon my bed
Nor thrust the pillow from beneath my head;
The neighbors shall muffle their heavy tread
When I am dead.

The undertaker who scowls me down
Each time I cry out through the town
Shall toil and sweat to sew my gown,
When I am dead.

Pale reverend who smiles but haughtily
Must bend his smug, reluctant knee
As slaves bear high this majesty,
When I am dead.

Sleek motorists who daily curse
My rattling cart and beggar's purse
Shall pause before the regal hearse,
When I am dead.

Then when I ride into Hell's broad gate
In such gold-and-purple tasseled state,
Satan himself will bow and scrape,
When I am dead.

And I shall be one of Hell's great czars,
Sorting, consigning, like bottles and jars,
Broken souls and shattered stars,
When I am dead.

TO A BIRD SINGING AT MIDNIGHT

Dorothy Countryman Dorr

O bird that in the dark hush of the night
Wakening, sings, and out of my first sleep
Roused me to share this vigil that you keep,
Fearing almost to breathe lest you take flight:
Yours cannot be the voice that yestermorning
Mimicked the meadowlark, the ecstatic wren,
No more than I am one who bantered then;
It was not you that mocked the shrike's rasped warning!
Reverently, forswearing insolent art,
Now in the solemn night you only tell
Your aching blisses, note by note, as slow
As sobered throbbing of the unmasked heart
That hugs this lovely moment, knowing well
It can stay nothing; even itself must go.

THE PETALS OF PEACE

Louisa Sprenger Ames

I want to live so joyously
 From day to shining day,
That echoes of my little songs,
 When I have gone away,
Will fall like petals on the path
 Where I have chanced to go,
With all the white remembered joy
 Of scented orchard snow.

W H Y ?

Flora Schrack

I have seen chasms yawn,
Heard cataracts roar;
I have watched geysers spout,
And have seen eagles soar;
I've endured monkey's chatter,
Heard saxophones bray.
I can listen to parrots
And tell what they say.

I know why brooks babble,
Why oceans are deep,
Why deserts are dusty
And mountains are steep;
Why sunshine makes shadow
And night follows morn,
But tell me, oh, tell me
Why crooners were born.

PRAYER IN BABYLON

Margaret J. E. Brown

Pour us iron to drink from the unleached earth;
Feed us from the hills; let us breathe the sky.
Wilting, lean from the pavement's dearth,
Our fruits are husk, meatless and dry.

We are alien here to the whirling shock,
The river of wheels that hurtle past;
Our roots are groping for planet rock
To hold when the floods break over at last.

When the sultry breath of the storm alarms,
When we bend and break as the lightning jeers,
When we signal heaven with frantic arms,
Toughen our strength from the earth's old years.

HYBRID

Neeta Marquis

Mismated his feet, one free, the other planted;
Foursquare his mind, his soul a little canted.

Life mocks him, knowing full well his ache to wander,
Holding him here while his passionate thoughts flee yonder.

Desperate, he schools his heart to long resistance,
Home a dull word against the sparkling distance;

Type of the saint, even with sins twice-seven,
Serving earth well though hungering for his heaven.

CONTENT TO REST

Marietta Thompson Sprague

My spring of life rose in obscurity,
A doubtful force by trickling drops renewed,
Till Youth its swift tumultuous course pursued;
Then gaining depth and breadth with surety
Ran channels of attained maturity,
To take the whirlpools with desire imbued,
And from sheer heights of ecstasy to brood
The fall and levels of security.

With smoother measured sweep now runs my race
To reach the deeper calm of inland sea;
Here ripples may not break its shadowed face,
A placid mirror of tranquillity.
Content to quest no far nor faster place,
It seeks no outlet save eternity.

SEA - MAID

Irene Stanley

In a witching waltz the sea-maid whirled
 To the circling gulls' weird glee,
As I woke to surroundings mother-of-pearled,
In a magical silver-pointed world
 On the sands of a western sea.

Away to the rounded rocks she danced
 For joy in the flood-tides' game,
Where the wild sea-horses plunged and pranced
 Through phosphorescent flame.

From their riders' lariats of foam
 I seized her and bore her away;
For a bride must go to her new lord's home,
 Whatever the sea-winds say.

In our prairie haven now she lies
 Night-long against my breast.
The foam-like laces fall and rise,
And the lids droop low on her fathomless eyes,
 But her heart knows little rest.

I follow her to a small ravine
 Where the blue-flax soon will blow.
She longs for the sea's own emeraldine,
 But I cannot let her go.

I cannot let her—and yet
 She is lost, even now, to me—
With her feet forgetting the pirouette,
 And her eyes recalling the sea..

THE COCOON

Jessica Lewis

My thoughts, like the tireless
Silkworm,
Spin and spin and
Spin me powerless, into
A cocoon

Seconds, minutes, hours, days and nights
Lengthen into eternal shadows
And come swirling about me
In swift motions,
Veiling me
Into bewilderment

Faces
Circle and press close,
Their eyes laughing, loving, hoping,
Beseeching, trusting,
Beckoning

Unwind me
From
My cocoon!

BRIDE IN BARCELONA

Eleanor Jordan

Now that the bombs have ceased,
From where I lie,
I see
A willow tree
Green with tender bud.
(How red a mother's blood!)
I see a mottled lark
Fly with a wisp of straw.
(Once I was safe—the law—
God, what a crimson flood!)
No dread
In nesting bird.
What was it gently stirred
Under my heart?
Naught, for my child is dead,
One with the quickening buds
That will not bloom this spring,
One with the baby birds
That never will take wing.
There flies
The lark.
Soon, soon, a mother dies
Alone, in the dark. . . .

LOST SHADOW

Nina Willis Walter

No lifetime can ever seem quite so long
As that silent hour when the heart's white song
Of joy, for the first time, lies mute and stilled
Where the urn of life has been tipped and spilled,
And the lover's shadow falls not on the door
Of a heart that knows he can come no more

W A S T R E L

Snow Longley Housh

Long have we supped together,
Comrade Death and I.
Smiling he watches me lift Life's glass
And drain it dry.

Reeling, the lights dim round me,
Far sounds the noisy rout.
It is time to fling down my last bright coin
And stagger out.

TO A SEEING-EYE DOG

Rose Parker

I shall not soon forget you, departed guide of mine;
Your love was true and tender, your touch a mute caress;
To you I was a treasured god whose every look and sign
Could chasten you to sorrow, or flood with happiness.

Renouncing ancient lineage, a wild and savage strain,
You quelled your hunter instinct to meet a blindman's need.
But now and then you broke your leash, became a wolf again,
If any danger threatened him whose footsteps you must lead.

The days are long without you; I miss your watchful care;
On many nights of wakefulness I listen in the dark,
And think I hear your padded feet quick-bounding up the stair,
But to my eager whistle comes no joyous frantic bark.

I know at some appointed time when I am called to ride
Upon a last swift journey far beyond the stratosphere,
My groping hands will feel your touch, and knowing you will guide
Your master safely through the mist, I shall not shrink nor fear.

THE FLOWER SHOW

Constance Praeger Fox

Around us in the tent, gay blossoms glowed,
And all their perfume floated through the air.
Insistently and loudly, gossip flowed;
“My dear, can you have heard?” and, “Did you see?”
And no one saw the flowers smile—but me!

THE TAJ MAHAL

Mabel W. Phillips

Ten thousand times ten thousand nightingales
Have sung before the glory of this shrine,
This marble splendor rising line on line
Toward the snow whose tint before it pales;
Yet every theme that would describe it fails,
For notes of melody cannot confine
The deeps of love that love has made divine,
In retold songs and softly whispered tales.

The limpid lake reflects the terraced green
Where peacocks strut their vivid gleaming fans;
The cypress trees, with slim directive grace,
From water's edge to temple shadows trace
And weave, with fateful mystery, their plans
Of harmony in honor of a queen.

FROM WHAT HIGH GARDEN

Lucille Evans

From what high garden of Olympian bloom,
what dewy, scented colonnade,
wistaria, have you strayed?
Surely, earth never made
alone such loveliness as this you hold
for us, wistaria!

These nectared chalices, filled with a dew
sweeter than ever bees of Hybla drew
from blossoms blowing in Sicilian vale—
this beauty, floating
through arching aisles of pale
mauve magic—these long scarves
of foamy-green and amethyst
have, of a truth, been kissed
by sweet Persephone's mouth.

Winds from the south
and spring's own friendly sun
have coaxed these wonder-blooms
from the gray mother-vine.

Now, in this April hour
they bud and break
in all their splendor.
However full may be
our throats of song, we stand
in voiceless rapture
before your mystery,
wistaria!

LIFE IS A LOVER

Vera B. Thomson

Life has caught me in his fierce embrace
And will not let me free,
He holds me close against his quickened heart
The while I strain to see,
Beyond his blinding breast, the still, green fields
Where I have wished to be.

Pinioned by hampering arms that cling and bind,
I follow where life leads;
Though rebel passions rise within my soul
They fall, like flailed reeds,
Before the devastating hurricane
Of countless, petty needs.

Rarely a glimpse of blue serenity
Rests my struggling eyes,
And then life holds me close and pulls me on,
Stifling my inner cries
For freedom from his bonds, freedom to lift
My prisoned hands to the skies.

Life is a lover brooking no half-turned cheek
Nor chilly finger-tips;
His blood is hot from the endless race of the ages;
Spurning the weak he outstrips,
He presses the laurel kiss of victory
On red, responsive lips.

F R E E D O M

Nuvar Esther Safarjian

I dreamed that all this green drenched world had changed
To business streets. Mile on mile they whirled
Their parallel and cold blockades that ranged
From mountain peaks to empty ocean depths.
My eyes were fenced behind their barricades,
My ears were stopped with clanging sawing noise,
My soul was warped with penny cheap arcades.

I woke. My eyes a hundred acres leaped
To a purple tinted eucalyptus tree,
And rambled back and counted all the greens
From jade to Chinese prints of murky sea.
They raced a hundred miles or more
And climbed a mountain dipped in misty rose,
Then stepped from spired peaks to silver stars—
But something calls. My eyes unconscious close;
My soul is hushed in silent praise to God
For His wide gracious world without steel bars.

THE FLOOD

I. D. Perry

The rain slants down and the skies are gray.

I gaze with dismay on the canyon floor;

The little cabin is washed away.

Not again shall my keys unfasten the door,

Nor lantern swing where it used to sway,

I gaze with dismay on the canyon floor.

Waves and torrents and splash and spray!

Gray walls and green roof I shall see no more;

The little cabin is washed away.

The furious stream ate the banks, and bore

Plank and timber to dark decay.

I gaze with dismay on the canyon floor.

Yesteryear by it my son was at play.

His sons shall not listen to gurgle and roar

Of the stream in the cabin it swept away.

Uprooted are live oak and maples and bay.

I gaze with dismay on the canyon floor.

The rain slants down and the skies are gray.

The little cabin is washed away.

REGENERATION

Grant S. Housh

The meadowlark is mine, and mine the breeze
That blows through orange blossoms, mine delight
Of strolling with the stars through aisles of night;
The sea laughs, thunders, ripples, raves to please
My whim; for me the clouds weave fantasies;
Hills take me by the hand and, by their might,
Drag me from sorrow's quicksand up the height,
Where winds cry shouts of joy, or whisper ease.

All mine. And when the chords of being shriek
With pain; when friend, turned serpent, stabs with fire;
When woman steers my boat on hidden snags;
I dodge my fellows, quit my roof, and seek
The blossoming grove, the meadow's joyous choir,
The protean sea, the stars, the mountain crags.

OWL

Emily Porter St. John

Out there
lost in moon-mist,
hear the ventriloquist!
How soft and clear!
But where?
Is he far away?
Or is he uttering very near
that secret stuttering funneled call?
Whenever silence captures all
and holds it for a moment listening,
drifts his ululating cry,
down-covered like the bird's wing.
Is he in the bay?
or the grevillea tree?
Far, farther on, I guess,
beyond the twin oaks' huddled inkiness.
Ah! what a skilled dissembler he!
for instantly, close by,
curves past me through the night
his spectral velvet flight!