"The masters set love of art above all and never consented to descend to the public; rather they strove to raise the public up to themselves. The mediocre do not need to descend; they are vulgar, on the level of the vulgar, to whom they talk in their own language. Let us regard the discouraged artist at his proper value."
--Dan'l Dourouze, Issue 8
the S4N: a Rather Irregular Arts Periodical


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Argument

Along about the 700th lustrum of his dégringolade Anthony Patch observed that the tendency of contemporary poetry was to eschew the beautiful and seek its effects by means of the startling and the ugly, whereas it was now the mission of prose to strive after the glamorous and glowing word. This is true, at least as far as it goes. It is good criticism, though imperfect fiction. If Anthony had had the perspicaciousness
to discover that, I cannot believe that he would have been damned. I fail to note that he was ever beautiful.

The reason is, doubtless, that writers have got tired of doing the other thing. In the 18th century poets not only loathed the ugly but insisted on expressing even the beautiful in a special and conventional way. Poetry wore its heaviest gyves and flourished ill under them. The Romantics did away with that, and when they found their feet won great freedom and power. One has but to think of lines like "Life is a dome of many-colored glass" and "The silver snarling trumpet 'gan to chide'.

The Victorians pushed the expression of beauty to its extremity. No one could
possibly be more liquid than Swinburne or more rich than Rossetti—and people got tired of trying to be. Swinburne parodied his own supreme power in that line about the mother “whose bosom-beats bound to the bliss-bringing bulk of a balm-breathing baby”. Reaction set in; people sought beauty, or at least interest, in the commonplace and homely. Kipling; he dared not go much further than calling the Queen the Widow of Windsor and mentioning the delicious word “harumphrodite”; but he was plainly reaching after the prosaic, the ignored—the ‘realistic’. Others followed, less squeamish: Masefield, Brooke, Masters, Sandburg...

As for prose, it had, on its separate
track, more or less led the way. *The Castle of Otranto* preceded *The Ancient Mariner* by many years; *Madame Bovary*, the *Barrack-Room Ballads*. That suggests an interesting thought: is prose now acting in its usual priority, and will poetry presently follow once more?

The issue is mixed; Anthony did not tell the whole truth about modern literary tendencies. The issue always has been mixed. At the very apogee of conventionality Swift wrote some extremely ugly and smutty things, both in prose and verse. The Elizabethans, in their romantic vein, did likewise. The moderns do the same, only more so: Masefield and Brooke mix the ugly and beautiful in almost every poem. In mat-
ters of form there is much obliquity of behavior. Amy Lowell, with all her penchant for prosidifying verse (born, I maintain in passing, chiefly of inability to create respectable conventional verse), is meticulous and Keats-like in her search for the connotative word. E. A. Robinson, like Henry James before him, clothes plots of pure melodrama in a straightjacket of verbiage and psychology. Realism and romanticism, passion and potatoes, mythology and skatology, formalism and freedom converge constantly. We are more in the air as to literary canons to-day than we are even in the fields of politics and economics.

Not that there is anything to alarm or provoke anger in all this. The human
race, collectively, will exercise its grand prerogative of simply discarding what it finds useless and silly, all in good time. At worst, writers are idiots, and then they are often amusing. When one author selects the adjective ‘rotten’ as the most appropriate epithet for the noun ‘stars’, I am far more grateful to her for diverting me than anxious for the safety of the poor thing’s reason. Many of these modern attempts and experiments and compromises are new and, oh undoubtedly, ‘interesting’. But if you suffer, as I do, from having an orderly mind, you may wonder occasionally (as I do) if the fundamental principles of writing are not as few and simple as they are in morals and the law, and if contemporary 16
authors, with all their imagination, freedom, adventurousness and honesty, are not sometimes deficient in the homely quality of Bean.

I wonder, for instance, if a person with real Bean would be prepared, after long thought and prayer, to deny that though the ugly may sometimes be beautiful, the beautiful is, on the whole, more so. Or that it is pleasanter to hear read and easier to memorize two successive lines out of Pope's Essay on Man than two successive lines out of the telephone directory. Or that prose is the normal vehicle for ideas that are more or less exact, logical and addressed to the intellect, while poetry is the normal vehicle for ideas that are emotional, illogical and
addressed to the imagination and aesthetic faculties. This last, particularly.

It is a curious fact, at least, that the great prose of the world has been written in prose, and the great poetry in poetry. There are prosy verses and poetic prose passages, yes, but they are not the greatest. Shakespeare, for instance, did not cast Hamlet in the form of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, nor did Flaubert attempt to concentrate Madame Bovary into the space and metre of Du bist wie Eine Blume. Some authors, like Goethe, Hugo, Meredith and Kipling, have been able to write both prose and verse successfully. But they said their prosy things in prose and their versy things in verse. They did not
confuse either their thoughts or their media, nor attempt to compromise them.

They did not say: My mind is too beautiful and free to be confined by the absurd popular distinctions between A and B, 2 and 3, red and blue; henceforth, friends, the world for me is a thing of A-plus-or-minus-B, two-and-one-half and purple. Amy Lowell said substantially that, and perhaps that is why she is so often called “interesting”. It may even be one reason why she smokes long black cigars. They did not say: I have written some poems in verse and they are good; I shall now write some in prose, and they will be good. That is what, in effect, Steve Benet once said, and perhaps... But we all love Steve.
Gray is a nice little color; you often hear it described as interesting. But it has hitherto failed to fulfil the uses of either black or white. Brooklyn Bridge is a pretty good invention, but as a substitute for either Manhattan or Brooklyn it is a dud. The Missouri Compromise... Ho hum; no one ever got anywhere this way. And there are people who prefer succotash to corn and to beans: as far as I’m concerned they are welcome to eat it. No--they should be made to eat it!

--Wayland Williams
On a le Droit d’Etre Gauche s’Il le Parait

“Man is imperfect; yet, in his literature, he must express himself and his own views and preferences; for to do anything else is to do a far more perilous thing than to risk being immoral: it is to be sure of being untrue.” —R.L.S.

“If one has an originality, the first thing necessary is to develop it; if one has none, it is necessary to acquire one.”

—GUSTAVE FLAUBERT, to his bastard son
“There never was an Art-loving nation.”
--James McN. Whistler, Ten o’Clock

“All life belongs to you, and do not listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits, or to those who would persuade you that this heavenly messenger wings her way outside of life altogether, breathing a superfine air & turning away her head from the truth of things.” --Henry James

“But no man, be his felicity and facility of expression what they may, ever produces good Literature unless he sees for himself, and sees clearly... Speak for yourself and from yourself, or be silent.” --George Henry Lewes
“My good people, ’tis not only impossible to please you all, but it is absurd to try.”

--William Makepeace Thackeray

‘The writer must be original or he is nothing... Nature is his mistress, truth his idol. The contemplation of a pure idea is the ruling passion of his breast. The intervention of other people’s notions, the being the immediate object of their censure or their praise, puts him out. What will tell, what will produce an effect, he cares little about: and therefore he produces the greatest.’ --Mr. William Hazlitt

NO ONE is more moderate, more timorously genial (as John Carter has guessed), than myself, usually--but in extremis give me extreme measures.
S4N-ers, it is time to spit in the eye of "the man in the street" and to defecate copiously on the doorstep of the Simple-Simon-pure in heart. About 99 per cent of American 'Art' is cowardly, bigoted, standardized, imitative pap, fit only to render roly-poly the spawn of a Rollo-Polly-Anna-nias union. True art is unafraid, all-embracing, multivarious, self-sufficient; and the true artist—oh well...

S4N-ers, on which side of this cis-Atlantican aesthetic Waterloo are you going to fight, anyway? Do you prefer easy victory to a glorious defeat?.. Come on, then; let us, about to die, salute the mob in appropriate Cambronnese!

---KENT MORGAN
Entremets

Emmett Dunn
Ramon Guthrie
The Odd Marriage of Strabismus

IT WAS in the days of King Nicodemus. The king was in the antechamber, the roof was the limit, and the pot was full.

"I pass," said the queen.

"Two," said the bishop, and he received them and was glad; for he got a blot and a frail, and he already had two blots and a frail, and his house was full.

And right so came the knight, and he hight Sir Olivier de Poissy, and
he slid out a stack of blues.

And right so came the king, and he called a passing maiden, and she was passing fair, and she hight La Belle Poulette. And the king said “Come hither and hunch me”; and she came and did hunch him, and he slid out blues, as many as Sir Olivier had slidden, and a white.

And right so came a mighty thundering at the point-d’appui.

“Ventre-saint-gris!” quoth the king, “Shall some base felucca thus dessicate our little game? Go you, Sir Bishop, and see what threatens.”

And the bishop rose up and departed in haste, for he feared the wrath of the king. And when the bishop was gone 28
the king amused himself stacking the cards, the queen and Sir Olivier meanwhile having a contretemp in the long dim intaglio.

But the bishop, going out along the flying-buttress, came at last to the portecochère and looked down over the portcullis.

"Who are you?" said he, "and what are your degrees? and I rede you be brief in answering, for the king is wroth and and respects no degrees, neither latitude nor longitude, in his wrath."

And there rode out from the yawning shadow of the architrave a man clad in a tabard of stucco, and he bare a mighty curmudgeon in his hand.

"Know you," he cried in a ponderous
and coruscating voice, “that I am Strabismus of the Out Isles, and I am come hither to demand the daughter of King Nicodemus, even the fair Myopia, in wedlock. Go and tell the hot king that, ere I sound the sobriquet upon my cuspidor and my gallowglasses rush to the attack.”

And the bishop went and told all to the king. And the king let send for Sir Olivier de Poissy.

“Sir Olivier,” said the king, “what do I pay you for? Do I pay you to hatch sedition, privy conspiracy and rebellion amongst the fair maids of the imperial court? or to pursue your innuendoes with my queen, the Belle Imperia? And now comes this Strabismus, and by my faith
he is an ill bird, and blows no one any good. But as for you, Sir Olivier,” said the king, “go you and clear this rubbish from my castle escapade, or I shall make you like unto Zebah and Zalmunna and to Gog and Magog. What?”

“Fair sire,” said Sir Olivier, “as for your queen, the Belle Imperia, wit you well I’m off that stuff, and you’re barking up the wrong tree,” said Sir Olivier, “But as for this Strabismus,” said Sir Olivier, “you say sooth for the most part, since he is well and unfavorably known to me; and he is indeed a lewd fellow of the baser sort, and it may well be that he will yet be the death of me,” said Sir Olivier, “But now I dare say,” said Sir Olivier, “and I also make mine
avow, that it will be me and him... and so farewell," said Sir Olivier. And anon Sir Olivier donned armor and departed.

But Nicodemus the king, and the Belle Imperia, and the bishop, and the three thousand young ladies of the imperial court, ascended to the pediment of the castle and gazed out from the façade.

And right so rode out Sir Olivier, and he feutred his habergeon and made an attack on Strabismus, crying “Ha! Madonna de Poissy!”

And thereupon came Strabismus crying “Esperance! Strabismus!”, and he made an attack on Sir Olivier.

Now leave we Sir Olivier and Strabismus and turn we to the king and to the bishop, who watched the fight from
the façade of the castle.

"Ha! Sir Bishop," said the king, "this is diplomacy, and this is the proudest day of my life," said the king, "for our daughter, Myopia, is a pert wench, and she maketh the money to fly withal, and I would I were well rid of her," said the king, "and as for this Strabismus, he is crude but stout withal; but Sir Olivier is crafty, and I distrust me of de Poissy," said the king, "that he hath raised much hob in our court."

And, even as the king spoke, Strabismus smote at Sir Olivier with his curmudgeon; and, though he slew him not, yet was the force and wind of the stroke so great that perforce Sir Olivier lightly avoided his horse: and then did

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STRABISMUS also dismount and came at him on foot.

But, when Sir OLIVIER was unhorsed, the queen (who had not yet spoken on account of her great modesty) cried out, saying: “Keep it up, Olly; he’s got a tin arm; you’ve got him swinging like a gate, kid; we’re all with you; it only takes one to do it; get the big stiff!”

And when the king heard the words of the Belle IMPERIA, he turned to the bishop and closed his port eye, as who should say: “Lo! did I not tell you all this?”

And now the fight waxed fierce and close, and so close did the fight wax that Sir OLIVIER, stepping back to avoid a blow from the redoubtable curmudgeon
of *Strabismus*, trod on air and fell into the castle moat. And right so came *Strabismus* and he did a Brodie also.

And they in the castle and *Strabismus*’ men let take hooks and they fished for the twain.

And, by chance, the hook coming down over the porte-cochère caught in the patella of *Strabismus*’ armor, and he was hauled inboard.

“Shall we keep him?” said the king.

“He’s over six inches,” said the bishop.

“Take him in, crack off his shell, wash him, bring him back, and we’ll give him the once-over,” said the queen, “But alas for Sir Olivier!” said the queen, “for those gallowglasses have taken him prisoner.”
And anon the king let send heralds, who shouted through the barbican: "Disperse, ye rebels; for Strabismus, your lord, has paid the penalty of his misdeeds with death."

But when the chief gallowglass heard that Strabismus was dead, he heaved up a mighty thorax and ran to Sir Olivier.

"It's you had best be saying your prayers," said he, "for it's not long you have to live; and Strabismus beyond in the castle decapitated, the way his head and body are not even on speaking terms!" And he smote him in the intermezzo, that he died; and he and his companions returned home.

But, within the castle, the king let send for Strabismus and Myopia.
“Strabismus my boy,” said the king, “if you want her, she’s yours. Bless you, my children... Shut the door when you go out.”

And when they had all departed, the king turned to the bishop, saying: “So much for that. Set ‘em up in the other alley... Zwei bier, garçon!”

--Emmett Dunn
Reasons

I LAY on the wet rocks and wept because the sea was so beautiful and shouted, triumphant that every ninth wave broke whiter than the rest. I would have followed a lifetime with ULYSSES or slept forever in the court of CIRCE.

Then you came beside me.
For a time you stood looking only at the rhythmmed rolling.

“But after all the sea is stupid,” you reflected; “It always does the same thing.”
I looked up and laughed.
Therefore I loved you.
When you broke the little sugar-bowl, you wept. And, having seen you laugh in the destruction of cities, I was filled with surprise, I who am so seldom surprised of late.

Wherefore I loved you.

Tea was over, I had talked too much and not well.

"What do you think of that charming lady who talked so brilliantly?" I asked when the last of them were gone.

"Hell!" you remarked idiomatically.

Therefore—although I might do otherwise—I love you.
I had thought that Hell was something abstract that each one must invent for himself. But you told me that it was still much as Dante had described it. I have learned more from you than from many learned doctors. For now I can kneel among charwomen and cobblers and pray with as much heart.

I am glad that you have come. My gods and I were weary and badly in need of repose.

--Ramon Guthrie
Review

William Rose Benét
The Voices of Vinal

The first thing that strikes me about Harold Vinal’s White April (Yale) is that here is Edna St. Vincent Millay’s first obvious disciple in the lyric. And why would a person of the opposite sex from one that early wears hair-ribbons, write thus?

In memory of sorrow
I’ll take them out again
And put a ribbon in my hair
And dance down the lane.

This is all very pretty for a young girl to write, but just why a young man should put a ribbon in his hair I fail to
see. It might be all right to dance down the lane, if no one was around to ejaculate coarsely: "Aw, cut the trick stuff!"

The trouble with Mr. Vinal is that he has quite too forethoughtedly 'put a ribbon in his hair'. He had better take it out.

That being said, as it had to be said, it is also to be said that—and then I was going to say something awfully nice, but my eye fell on the poem Deborah Speaks. Now one of Aline Kilmer's children is named Deborah, and Mrs. Kilmer has written poems about her, and Mrs. Kilmer has also written a poem called Candles That Burn: and here Mr. Vinal has Deborah and candles that burn, and Faith and Caroline, and Rose and Margaret; and, not content with all
those young things, Sar a Te asdale’s old flame, Strephon, comes in in the last verse. I call that too bad.

As we part with Part I in such fashion, we discover that Part II is entitled Sonnets for Weeping. When I am weeping I don’t want sonnets that are made particularly for that state of mind. I too could, as Mr. Vinal says, ‘weep my heart out, late and soon’—and that isn’t a spoof either—; but if ‘old loveliness’, as he puts it, ‘returned this afternoon to break my heart and make me weep aloud’—(it is better, by the way, to do that strictly alone)—, I should not turn to a series of sonnets made for a special purpose, to soothe my weeping, as Bell-Anns (adv.) are made to soothe my digestion. It is
a mistake.

**Part III** is more robust in its title, *Of Mariners*. Now I have, as Mr. Vinal declares he has, inferentially, ‘thrilled with wonder at the surge of drifting water, wayward as a child’. In fact, I thrilled at it no later than this morning, sitting on a life-line and letting the waves wash over me. It’s great stuff. That the water is far more effectively wayward than any child I have ever known, I can testify to; the undertow and the sea-puss of some beaches is something to grapple with. As for that thirsty wind journeying from the South—to lay a cool wet finger on my mouth—of which Mr. Vinal speaks,—yea bo! I’ve felt that wind, and this minute I am as thirsty as the eternal
hot sands. But suppose the wind has journeyed; no bootlegger has--to lay a cool wet finger on my mouth. (Three fingers, thank you!) That's why I complain.

The whole trouble with this review is that it is being written in high spirits after a morning on the beach and a remarkably appetizing lunch. I have felt as lorn as Mr. Vinal ever felt, but I don't happen to feel lorn today. I feel soo-perb!

Now let me stop at once this unseemly stuff and try to say something helpful and decent. In the first place, Mr. Vinal ought n't--(and this is said sincerely enough)--to indulge in poetic melancholy any more than he can help. There is a startling difference between real grief and poetic melancholy--v. Mrs. Brown-
ING’s great sonnet on grief. “If it could speak, it could arise and go.” I do not like that title, *Sonnets for Weeping*, and I like almost as little another Part title, *White Glamour*. Though in this section are some of the poet’s best poems.

Mr. Vinal has read the best modern American women lyricists and has learned from them the effectiveness of simplicity, the strength of delicacy, the grace of fragility. But he is not yet speaking with his own voice. His verse is like his magazine, full of *Voices*.

To speak with your own voice you do not have to bellow, but you have to eschew an influence whenever you feel it, and fight for your life against everyone else’s poetry. This does not, of course,
mean that you may not be the greatest appreciator of other people’s poetry in the world. But the important thing is not whether you can ‘write as well as that’ but whether you can express yourself at all. Most of us can’t.

If I have poked fun at Mr. Vinal overmuch, I am now sorry. It was meant as no personal affront. I have merely said exactly how it hit me, which may or may not be worth anything. I have said precisely what I have felt.

I cannot prophesy how far Mr. Vinal may go in his poetry. It’s a hard road for anyone. He has learned certain things and his book as a whole makes no great impression on me. I certainly wish him all the success in the world. I wish he
would write something with a biting edge. I wish he would go farther than achieving simplicity and grace and achieve a simplicity and a grace peculiar only to himself. I say, Good speed to him!—and if I have tried to be irresistibly comic at his expense, he has a perfect right to be irresistably comic at mine.

--William Rose Benet
CRITICISM & COMMENT

EDITORIAL NOTE: JOHN BISHOP
WON LAST ISSUE’S $10 PRIZE BY
AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY.

ISSUE XVI:

Epistle to All Friends

When one has a clear idea of what one wants to say and how to say it, the effect should be obtainable without such a ponderous use of similes. —RAMON GUTHRIE

ISSUE XVIII:

The Editor’s ‘Attack’ on J.P.B.

I am inclined to agree with Bishop’s es-
timate. Steve dissapointed me dreadfully in his chapters on undergraduate life. —William Augustus Hanway

I raise my rude voice against the unrestrained and indecent hymning of Benet the ewe-lamb, the white-headed boy, the city cousin. Granting that he is the one S4N-er who drinks straight ambrosia without gagging and bestrides the fractious Pegasus with an air of genuine mastery—why be so maternally and shamelessly proud of him? and intolerant of his critics? Nota Benét is no longer a necessary admonition. —Charles Sweeney

We Being Young

The 'gleaming spars' and 'silken sails'
and ‘clean adventure and high zest’ with which he regales us have done long and faithful service and are entitled to be retired on full pay to the various campuses from which they came. --C. R. Sweeney

_The Proud Prince_

It is especially good. --Oliver Jenkins

**ISSUE XIX:**

_Birthday Ode_

Clever and gay, it contains no trace of sub-adult ‘soul’ exposure. --W. S. Lewis

Ingenious and true. --M. J. Spencer

_Esforensica_

_He_ said something. --Eleanor Foster
Melitta
Methinks he’ll bear watching. At present his verse is young, but it has gusto, striking phrases, lyric glow. --Sweeney

Sonnet
Good idea well spoken. --J. Crawford
What wistful flatulence! --C. Sweeney

Bunniana
He writes a darn good letter and has a list of synonyms that would do credit to Gyp ‘the Blood’ or even to Eurycea bis-lineata (Green). --Emmett R. Dunn
CONTRIBUTORS
TO THIS ISSUE

William Rose Benet is the associate editor of The Literary Review.

Reginald Marsh has had drawings in Vanity Fair, The Bookman, etc.

The other contributors to this issue have already appeared in S4N issues, thus..

Ramon Guthrie: 1-5, 7, 9, 11-14, 16-19
Wayland Williams: 12, 14, 18, 19
Emmett Dunn: 19 & 20
Kent Morgan: 16
NOTES ON S4N-ERS

Wayland Williams' new novel, Family (Stokes), is due to appear this fall.

Tom Chubb is writing a historical novel.

Frank Shay is printing some of Howard Smith's one-act plays.

Oliver Jenkins' Open Shutters has been favorably reviewed by the Lyric West, Chicago News and Post, Boston Herald, and Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch; and Harold Vinal's White April, by the Boston Transcript and Herald.
VOICES
A Journal of Verse
Edited by
HAROLD VINAL

Numbers Among Its Contributors

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