

OTHERS

TWENTY CENTS A COPY

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FOR
EMANUEL CARNEVALI

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WILLIAM C. WILLIAMS**

OTHERS

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GLORIA!

Emanuel Carnevali, the black poet, the empty man, the New York which does not exist, the end of Others: if I have said nothing to you until this time it is because it is no longer in my tongue to say anything, because what I have to say is in my fingers now, in a few swillish back numbers of Others, because it is in two or three other men's bellys.

And yet, old as I have become, I'll shake it out in a dance for you. I'll dance for you now and I'll dance still on a proper occasion when I have grown so ankylosed that only a grimace is left me. I celebrate your arrival.

It is for you we went out, old men in the dark. It is for you that the rubbish stirred and a rat crawled from the garbage, alive! in that filth. What else was Others at that time: a rat in the garbage heap of New York. And now by God you come with a belly sticking to your back and you show us what we are, rats. The stench had already told us that we were alive.

There is nothing to despise now but vermine: Others.

Others has come to an end. I object to bringing out another issue after this one. Others is not enough. It has grown inevitably to be a lie, like everything else that has been a truth at one time. I object to its puling 4 x 6 dimension. I object to its yellow cover, its stale legend. Everything we have ever done or can do under these conditions is being done now by any number of other MAGAZINES OF POETRY! Others has been blasted out of existence. We must have a new conception from the bottom up or I will not touch it.

Do we want to publish our own filth? Is that what we want?

The reason for our having been alive is here! What do I care if Carnevali has not written three poems I can thoroughly admire? Who can write a poem complete in every part surrounded by this mess we live in? The man is smashed to pieces by the stupidity of a city of s**tas**s. He will not allow me to take a line out of a poem—"eyes like spittle", "—the rocking-chair held him as God held Adam at the creation". He is right. I am wrong when I yell technique at him. His poems are bad, full of nonsense because he is filled with death, day in day out: because he is young. His poems will not be constructed, they cannot be. He is wide open! He is black, speckled with flashes. But he is wide, Wide, WIDE open. He is out of doors. He does not look through a window.

We older can compose, we seek the seclusion of a style, of a technique, we make replicas of the world we live in and we live in them and not in the world. And THAT is Others. The garbage proved we were alive once, it cannot prove us dead now. But THAT is Others now, that is its lie.

The man is becoming crazy before he starts. He already begins to scream for success, for a large success like Victor Hugo!

It is an impossible situation. When the proprietor of The Dial asks him for a paper on Papini which he prepares and has returned to him "because it does not coincide with the PRESENT policy of the magazine" and no explanation, he goes into an acute mania. In a chance moment he attacks insanely not the proprietor but an editor and says ALL the true things that should be said about an editor of such a magazine. Then a few days later I get the following letter from another writer:

You were in to an Others Theatrical Society meeting last night, at which Mr. Carnevali let loose a flood of profane vituperation upon the head of Mr. Clarence Britton, Assistant Editor of The Dial. Mr. Britten is only a salaried employee of The Dial and so has no final say in the acceptance of manuscripts. Let the ferocious Mr. Carnevali go after actual conservatives and reactionaries if he feels in a destructively crusading mood. But when he attacks helpless radicals trying now and then to squeeze something good into the magazine that employs them he simply makes a silly ass of himself.

And this is reputed to be the center of American civilization! It is so patently a rubbish heap, this New York, so rankly putrefying that no poet can live here unless he acknowledges that he is putrefying. If he does not, there will remain such deadly fumes as this.

Jesus, Jesus save Carnevali for me. He is only beginning to disintegrate. Since he cannot appeal to an intelligence that does not exist give him the only alternative of being consciously a black man. But he is slipping into the afternoon at 21. (Why cannot I leave hands off him with my nonsense?) I believe he will go crazy or quit rather than write in a small way.

But what good if he quit? He is a reader. The French technicians have him already more or less at stance. They are his poison. Why are they poison? Because they whisper to him: death, death, death! Rimbaud, La Forge, Corbiere, they offer him solace. They prove to him that he is foredoomed. I am right this time. THEY are failures for the same reason that I am a failure, because they make a technique out of their vision of perfection. They can WRITE better than any of us. Yet they refused to write beyond a certain logical horizon. They were COMPLETE men. Which proves, TO ME, only that they are dead men. Carnevali perhaps you will do as they did. It is impossible to remain alive plastered with leucorrhoeas and vomitings.

In France one goes mad or wipes art from his brain. In this country one retreats to an Others. One slips back (but one MIGHT have written better stuff) one slips back at last with savage resentment—like a beast with a bone in his throat.

We salute you.

POETRY

I too, dislike it: there are things that are important
beyond all this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it,
one discovers that there is in
it after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, these things are important not because a
high sounding interpretation can be put upon them
but because they are
useful; when they become so derivative as to
become unintelligible, the
same thing may be said for all of us—that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand. The bat,
holding on upside down or in quest of something to
eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll,
a tireless wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a
horse that feels a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician—case after case
could be cited did
one wish it; nor it is valid
to discriminate against “business documents and
school-books”; all these phenomena are important.
One must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets,
the result is not poetry,
nor till the autocrats among us can be
“literalists of
the imagination”—above
insolence and triviality and can present
for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads
in them, shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on one hand,
in defiance of their opinion—
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand,
genuine then you are interested in poetry.

NUN SNOW:

A pantomime of beads.

Earth Voice.

Is she
thoughtless of life,
a lover of imminent death,
Nun Snow
touching her strings of white beads?
Is it her unseen hands
which urge the beads to tremble?
Does Nun Snow,
aware of the death she must die alone,
away from the nuns
of the green beads,
of the ochre and brown,
of the purple and black—
does she improvise
along those soundless strings
in the worldly hope
that the answering, friendly tune,
the faithful, folk-like miracle,
will shine in a moment or two?

Moon Voice

Or peradventure,
are the beads merely wayward,
on an evening so soft,
and One Wind
is so gentle a mesmerist
as he draws them and her with his hand?

Earth Voice

Was it Full Moon,
who contrives tales of this order,
and himself loves the heroine,
Nun Snow—

Wind Voice

Do you see his beads courting hers?
lascivious monk!—

Earth Voice

Was it Full Moon,
slyly innocent of guile,
propounder of sorrowless whimses,
who breathed that suspicion?
Is it One Wind,
the wily, scholarly pedant—
is it he who retorts—

Wind Voice

Like olden allegros
in olden sonatas,
all tales have two themes,
she is beautiful
he is beautiful,
with the traditional movement,
their beads court each other,
revealing a cadence as fatally true
as the sum which follows a one-plus-one—
so, why inquire further?
Nay, inquire further,
deduce it your fashion!
Nun Snow,
as you say,
touches her strings of white beads,
Full Moon,
let you add,
his lute of yellow strings;
and, Our Night
is square, nay,
Our Night
is round, nay,
Our Night
is a blue balcony—
and therewith close your inquisition!

Earth Voice

Who urged the beads to tremble?
They're still now!
Fallen, or cast over me!
Nun, Moon and Wind are gone!
Are they betraying her?—

Moon Voice

Ask Our Night—

Earth Voice

Did the miracle appear?—

Moon Voice

Ask Our Night,
merely a child on a balcony,
letting down her hair and
black beads, a glissando—
ask her what she means,
dropping the curtain so soon!

COLLECTORS

The barnacle of crowds—
Like a tuck
On a finished skirt, unnoticed—
He collected his material
Covertly:
A ragpicker,
A scavenger of words.

And the gleanings
Of his hearing
He would costume
In his own words,
And parade before
A listener.

So that now,
Across the tea-cup,
He was telling
Of his research,
Of his study,
Of his deep thought-out
Conclusions.

And the lady,
Connoisseur of old thoughts
Bound in new gilt bindings,
Smiled approval
At the finding
Of another curio
To place
In her long gallery.

THE ROOM IS AS WE LEFT IT

The room is as we left it
But mellowed to a heightened
Dignity.
The chairs
Have summer coverings
Of cobwebs,
The teakwood lamps are there,
And still the bed sags
To the center,
And the table throws

Its weight of shadow
On the spread
. . . Folly to have left the room unused:
You did not merit such a nicety

A ragged ache of light
Sifts through the dust:
Blotches
A grotesque of the present
Upon the patterns of the past . . .
My hands are bruised by surfaces
I do not see,
My fingers falter up and down
A tracery of years,
I sense the echo of a voice
I do not hear,
I am not sure the breath I hold
Is mine.

DESTINY

Parcae, here I am
Winding a love-sunrise
Around my spring-soil heart,
And covering my eyes
With silver-blue moonlight.
And like the sagebrush
I shall follow you to the desert.

HAZEL DEAN

She is beautiful in her prudence
Which is persuasive in its sweetness,
And appeals to the finer sensibilities
Of men.

The bloom of her youth is also beautiful.
The cleverness of her repartee is felicitous.
Her love is beautiful.
She is conscious of her love
And the philter of her eyes.

Alas, her beauty will not endure,
Except her intrinsic goodness
Which is her soul's beauty.

Her woman's intuition
Has taught her some things,
And her heart;
But she has no capacity for books,
She is nescient of the ponderance of life
And a help-mate's philosophy of life
Which are the lasting beauties of life;
For anility disputes somatic charms.

When I have tired with my lucubrations
And taxed with the lore of books
And the gravity of the universe,
The lightness of her heart and downy talk,
The freshness of her naïve self
Offer me a diversion of thought.

Sometimes I talk with her about her lovers
Who are near the age of her;
For I am older than she is.
This gives me the advantage
Of a more extended lover's past,
With a tentation of romance
Which she delights to hear related,
Because, trusting to chance and her girlhood
Has denied her
Extensive, tentative romance.

Her inscient heart knows I love her,
But rather as a filigree gill
(I have loved her hand tactually)
And she has also discerned
That the love-world of ours
Is a dream-world,
Being too frail and small
To hold the future with its realities.

LILLIAN

She's a little rustic beauty
In the quaint village of my boyhood,
But the simplicity of her manner
Pleases me
Since I've returned from the city
For a brief visit,
Having eluded the charms
Of accomplished women
With a bit of dash and adventure.

She is younger than I am,
Being a minoress.
I reached my majority
Two years ago.

Her flavicomous head
Reaches to my shoulder.
I like to look down into her blue eyes
While she looks up into my face.

Sunday afternoon,
With some of her chums and some of mine,
We sauntered down to the spring,
Just below the bridge.
She sat down on the elevated platform
Of concrete
And let her feet dangle over the edge
Of the enfonced tile,
While the water, from the iron-pipe
Below,
Trickled into the creek.

Her silken hose betrayed
The symmetry of her crus,
The comeliness of her ankle.
I looked at her and smiled and said,
"Oh, that I were a sculptor."
Then waggishly I looked—well, into the spring.
She smiled, blushed a little,
Then shifted her position.

I can't say that she's in love with me,
Although, I'm sure, that my waggery,
Manifested now and then,
And my city ways
Appeal to her as a novelty.
I can't say that I'm deeply in love with her,
But I admire the little rustic beauty;
For the simplicity of her manner
Pleases me.

DORA NORTHERN

I met her at her aunt's.
She was psychic sunshine
And somatic witchery.

She was from Kentucky,
And returned to Kentucky
Where she died;
But her sunshine did not go into the grave.

She had a heart to love you with,
But she liked to turn coquette,
Now and then, in the midst of her love.

We sat on the sofa one night,
The philter of her smile
Went straight to the citadel of my heart.

I surrendered for that night,
She knew it was just for that night.

She was listening while I talked:
"We will build us a house," I said,
"A little log-cabin, you know,
Back of some man's cornfield,
On the creek, in the woods.

We will whitewash it
And plant ivy around the door,
Which will climb up the wall
And drop down in big green clusters.

You can raise chickens
And I'll raise hogs
And we'll drink creek-water
And live in perfect bliss and ignorance."

She deftly clasped her magnetic hands
Which lay in her virgin lap
And leaned nearer to me
With her pretty face atilt
And smiled coquettishly and said,
"In my imagination
I can see that beautiful little home."

TO DIVERSE CONTEMPORARIES

1.

The roots of old thoughts blossom underground,
Achieve a putative and dark fruition:
The pollen of imagined passions
Sprinkles dead leaves of grass,
Which rustle drily
To the wind's perverted lashings;
And all the weather-cocks point north
Or south or east or west
At your mere breathing;
Beauty has reached its menopause
And sleeps serenely sterile—
Tho its dreams are teeming.

2.

O holy scarab,
Squatting upon the mantle-shelf
With wise antennae raised
To the admiration of the drawing-room,
Does no one know
That you have been
Upon the village road,
Rolling dung-balls
In the morning sun,
With other tumble-bugs?

EARTHY ANECDOTES

Every time the bucks went clattering
Over Oklahoma
A firecat bristled in the way.

Wherever they went,
They went clattering,
Until they swerved,
In a swift, circular line,
To the right,
Because of the firecat.

Or until they swerved,
In a swift, circular line,
To the left,
Because of the firecat.

The bucks clattered.
The firecat went leaping,
To the right, to the left,
And
Bristled in the way.

Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
And slept.

LIFE IS MOTION

In Oklahoma,
Bonnie and Josie,
Dressed in calico,
Danced around a stump.
They cried,
"Ohoyaho,
Ohoo" . . .
Celebrating the marriage
Of flesh and air.

EASTER DAWN

1.

Dawn at my window . . .
Dawn, a spent runner resting on white stones,
stones of Grace Church,
stones of Fifth Avenue,
stones of the arch at Washington Square—
touching now with a gaunt pallor
the winged Victory above my bed.

2.

Shall I too press—how much of my essence?—
in a cube of space—
make pebbles of dreams for the dawn to rest on?
Shall I break this infinite circle of myself,
closed yet forever expanding,
to fling my tall white thought like a lily
under the running feet of dawns?

MY SECRET

Old Vassalboro sleeps upon the hills
beside the Kennebec, where it has slept
through many quiet years.

For the first time,

but yesterday, I passed along the road
that forms its only street. At either hand
a few great houses dozed beneath great elms
drowsy with morning dampness and June heat.
Such is the ancient village. It is like
an aged woman nodding on a porch.
I passed as reverently as if I passed
some aged woman nodding on a porch,
for, at one hand, I saw the ruined cellar of a great, old house that
burned, last spring——
the homestead of a blood I will not name;
and, as I passed,
I looked for a graveyard
in which is buried
a woman whose name I should not utter
lest it be heard by another woman.
It is because I love both women.
Below,
afar,
stretched the vast valley in a passionate haze,
a verdant expanse of lovely declivities
grand with the sight
of ancient farms
of long established opulence.
I cannot utter the name of the woman
who must have looked across that valley
scores, hundreds of times,
dreaming, perhaps of me.

Little pinks, I hope, are growing on her grave.
I hope the birds sing, often, near the mound——
the warbler,
the catbird——
and I know that I should bring some flowers, sometimes, when I
can, and place them against the stone that bears the name I
cannot utter.

POÈME EROTIQUE (Grieg)

How do you know that I do not love you?
Because I have never sung of my love?
Are you not sick of the songs of men?

I shall not sing. For I have heard the wildcat calling at midnight.
I shall not sing. For I have heard the robin warbling at dawn.

I shall not even speak. For I have seen two snakes basking side
by side in the noonday sun.

I shall not even speak. For I have seen the dragonflies, by twos,
darting above the swamps.

Down by the river an old road
runs through the pines, along the bank.
The river glitters through the pines
at one hand. At the other hand
loom the first pines of a dark, deep wood.
One never meets another, there.
Once in a while a distant shout resounds——
a swimmer's shout——
indolently,
wildly pure,
like the bark of a fox
or the bleat of a lamb,
somewhere afar.
Once in a while
a catbird sings
within the wood.
Every day
the catbird sings,
once in a while.

Tomorrow, let us walk along the road,
and I will let the catbird sing my song.
But we must be as silent as two snakes.

TO W——

Not a word. I love you even now as I have never loved—
even now,
even you.
Yet not a word to me.

It is too late. Your letter did not give me one small thrill, even
though it seemed that you were thrilled.
It came as the light of candles comes, though of candles that are
brought to a feast
after the guests have met in darkness and have dispersed.
The feast that I prepared for you has long since soured, cold,
untouched,
and flies
and moths
swarm in the light you bring to me——
many flies,
many moths.

It is too late. Candles at dawn are ghastly, and I am at the dawn
of another day;
quiet dawn.
Do not speak.
Know that my love for you is like the vast, hot light that spreads
abroad, these days, upon the mighty, rolling, ploughed and
harrowed hills beside the dread, majestic Kennebec.
Know that my love for you is as constant, as virile, as strong, as the
beaming flood that bears that name.
Yet not a word to me.

SERENADE

Come on, don't be afraid you'll spoil me
if you light the gas in your room
and show me
that you have heard my cries.

Are you so poor in kisses
that you're so stingy with them;
and is your heart so ravaged
that you won't let me pick there
one or two flowers
to stick in my jacket's
button-hole?

I play my serenade
beating with my clenched fist
on a gong and a drum.
What I want is to give you
the sound of what a man is.

I love my eyes and lips
better than yours;
besides, the dampness of the night
pierces my shoes.

I can be as capricious
as you can be, don't worry!

Come on, open that window
or I'll go home.

LEAVETAKING

Translated by Emanuel Carnevali

Love, this is not your moment.

Days in which I would hide in another body like the grooved stone in the meat of the peach.

Blacksilk nights with accompaniment of rivers and neopolitan jealousies.

Mornings of blue bathing, of gay rain, with the memory of kisses under the dome of the umbrella of "true fame."

Hours all mine signed by the fire and the smoke of cigarettes; minutes of beatific amnesia between one and the other streetcar rail.

Days, nights, mornings, hours, minutes of personal life, but without crude colors.

Green shutters, shutters drawn-to, how many eyes are looking from behind your strips? Behind the white curtains, too, some woman who has not yet lit the light is waiting. Over the terraces facing the fields the eyes of children are reflected in the irises and the bourgeois odor of red-velvet roses is arising.

How slow the clouds go! From one square to the other the breech has time to become clear again; the smoke of the train sailing on the horizon toward the mine country leaves them slowly behind.

Love, this day also cannot be yours.

Pass and pass again, shamelessly, under my window, so long and skinny in fashionable skirts. You do not weigh, over the rectangles of the sidewalk, more than the shadow stretched under your little boots.

In the time of the ancient Romans women were perhaps more corpulent; I see their nipples like round and wrinkled scars over breasts of polished brown wood. But today, even in the most squalid hours of the calmest day, the big bourgeois girls, their faces yellow with lust, can't be missed in the dusty sunlight of the suburban roads. From what sheets did their arms of lazy embroiderers come this morning? And why do they look with so much curiosity from under the black hedges of their lashes, as if every male were ready, for them, to climb the stairs of the city-hall?

Nothing doing with marriage licenses, girls. And your lips are already bleached as when one has drunk vinegar. To kiss you we shall wait for the night and the shadows of the boulevard, far from the lamp-posts. And we shall put our hands on your faces only, for the rest can't be as hard as in your school-days. How wet you must be with this heat and with so many desires! I almost feel under my hand the wet hair of your arm-pits and the dampness descending down the center of your corset.

It's too late this morning also, love. You're not ugly, dressed so in white and yellow, in tango and strawberry. But all these people looking from the doors of drug stores, over the bridges of the factories, from behind the panes of the tailor and especially from inside the bar, where everything shines, soaked as in a bath-room—

We will go over the hills. We will go back to the furzes that have only an odorless tuft at the top of the long stalk, already flabby!

Who will gather the clusters of wisteria except the cavalry soldier who has laid beside him the big clean sword in order to squeeze nearer his plump brunette?

Evening bells, don't hope anything any longer. None will come for the avemaria now that it is no more cold outside—and it's a long while since you ceased to move me.

From a tired volcano which one can't see the dank ashes of evening come down in dark balloons. Between two tall and white houses the sun finishes burning in the red of a wagnerian furnace.

There isn't a single reason to go down again after we have climbed up here. All the valley is filthy with the life of the day and on the mountains opposite the drinking-places kindle their lights like the tabernacles of the madonnas and the footlights of the stage.

On the French background of a painted-in hothouse a big whore, rolled up in a blue thing, sings with her mouth and her nose, promenading from one wing to the other, as if they weren't yelling at her. She too was a child, virgin and lean, in some part of the past and her aunts gave her five cents on a holiday when she had behaved at mass. Don't look at her face, you blackguards. Don't think evil. Think of the real flowers that are far from here. So much rice powder there is on her face and so much water has passed over her flesh that she is as white as the purest lady. I see her from tonight forward, already in the bed whence she will not be able to lift herself alone. The sheet folded over is white as her face and that mouth of hers that sang and smiled now asks for nothing but a glass of water—that mouth which will remain forever half-closed in the common grave of the unknown ones.

Love, this evening too, it's too late. You don't know where I'm going. Every door is shut and I haven't the keys with me. It's the hour when even Mendelsohn's exercises which descend to the infinite from the first floors and the gurgling ditties of aloof thugs, move me.

All the doors are shut and all the eyes are shut behind the shut windows. Who should have keys to open your doors and a little goodness to re-open with a caress your eyes!

Noon has dried all my sweetness. When the brain has thought every organ is quiet. I can walk without second-thought along the empty and lunar streets, like a night policeman who doesn't think of the sorrows hidden behind the perpendiculars of the walls.

The wind follows me to the oval pool and the lamps shine between the threads for me only. There is no melancholy in my banished heart but I can no longer remember the joy of those nights when I was not alone in my bed and there was another breath near my sore lips.

Goodbye, love. Goodbye for this evening and for this life. There isn't time enough 'left us. I go back home, fast steps, because the silent drops of the nocturnal morning again wet the street that had dried an hour ago.

BOGEY MAN

I was then a tenant of one of those red, furnished-room houses in the Westside. I lived on the second floor. Upstairs there was the sink. That's where I went to wash myself. Up the stairs, each step of the stairs had lost its horizontality and threatened to fall to the floor below. From a skylight window bulging in the ceiling an evergrey day oozed. And I was often asking God-knows-whom what diabolic extremes or what extraordinary device of economic poverty had made the landlord paint the walls green. Dark shining green. Shining in winter. Sweating in the summer like a degenerate's face. Upstairs there was the sink. By the sink the toilet. And from the toilet . . . ah, only censurable words can say what weighed down upon the furnished-room-house, dry and cracked with old red paint on its face and choked by the tenants' breath and the multitudinous dust of the carpets that were fullsome with unswept years!

I went to wash myself. The girl was straightening the rooms. It was two P.M. The girl had dropped the broom and its stick had fallen with a *tock* upon one of the hall-room doors. The girl had gone into a room. The tenant of the insulted door came out. A great white nose that stuck out of two hollow grey cheeks and a moustache like a threat.

— Listen, he cried.

— Yes.

He slammed the door open and I think what I saw is also censurable. He took a book in his hands. Shook the book before my eyes,

— I gotta fon da dichonary book, see!

— Yes. . . . well what. . . . do you?

— See?

— Do you want to sell it? I don't want to buy it.

— Mabbe I no speak english. Listen

His big teeth appeared and disappeared, monstrously.

— I gotta fon da dichonary book. Mabbe you good . . . I no say you no good. . . . mabbe. Hu make noise bump me. . . . I kick. . . . no can shleep. . . . I gib you fon da kick. . . . you no stand? I good, you no good, you no see, mabbe, I no say. . . .

And then, with a last great push, with long-bursting expansion:

— I gib you fon da dichonary book.

I understood at last that he wanted to throw it at me. I explained:

— I didn't do anything wrong to you. I can't understand.

It was the damn broomstick had awakened the man and all his night with him, his night darker for his ignorance of english.

So I went downstairs and laughed. But something more happened. I didn't know he was a night worker. Perhaps I didn't care how many night workers there were in the house. I sang all the time. That is, I used to scream uproariously old songs and Brahm's Wiegenglied which I had just learned and K-K-K-Katie, beautiful

Kaaaa-tie! One day as he passed my door, the Pole—for he was a Pole—shouted:

—No can sleep. Some people make noise. I fix.

He shouted it so fearfully and loudly that it came upon me and shook me like thunder shakes a window. It was threatening and ominous.

* * *

You pass in the street and look sideways and down, and sideways. Hardly you lift your eyes from the broken sidewalk before you. As far as to see the sky your head never twisted. And a mother points you out to her child,—Sh! Look at the bogey man. They are all against you. All they who know english. They enjoy knocking at your door, they who won't see how much you need your sleep, and you must get angry at yourself, because you know these creatures who go to vaudevilles and put on queer neckties on Sunday morning, you know they're awake making a noise which they have a right to make, being more beautiful than you, knowing english. What was there came to you and revealed itself? What were the new things? The wife you married in Poland and is dead one year now: two months after the wedding, that new thing you knew it to be a shape of the eternal misery. All are against you. When you open your eyes you see a broken sidewalk, broken with its own tragedy and not your own. If you would sometimes lift them you would see a sky that can't absolutely have anything to do with you. Because—a girl told you about your nose, about your small brown eyes, told you you weren't nice looking, remember?—well, that's why. As for me, I wasn't the one to throw the broom against your door but I don't care how much the broom awoke you. You think the world is a garden of happy children and you're a bugbear, don't you? Well, no one knows better than you do. You have seen one face of truth, it is the whole truth to you who couldn't see any other, and you are snarling at it. Poor dog, snarl, and bite if you can, but it's a big city, it's many people, it's too many things are your foe.

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I love you because you scream. Because if you thought that sometime they'll gag you and throw you in the nuthouse you would scream more. I beg you, don't stop screaming, snarling and feeling like a mad dog must feel when he walks with his tail under his belly. You could with some effort become a definite untruth, a pleasant one. You are an uncouth verity now. Look in the face of these houses, look straight in the face of the lunchroom cashier girl who takes with pretty fingers the coin you hand her with trembling ones. Bogey man, look straight in the warm eyes of any child, out of your frozen deep eyes. I promise you—something there is your hands will set trembling forever, if you will but look and touch. Something you'll find that will go following you, having irrevocably heard your uncompromising voice. And somebody will stop calling you insane, somebody will stop calling you insane and he won't say one word more for the rest of his life.

BELLY MUSIC

SUPPLEMENT

BELLY MUSIC

I am in the field against the stupidity of the critics writing in this country about poetry today. It begins with Fletcher's polite nonsense, worse than nonsense, **CULTIVATION AND THE WILD IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH POETRY**. What is the sense of this card-board shoebox of English flamflam? What good is it to us? Fletcher have you forgotten how to exist that you have to purvey to us such oatmeal mush: Oxford Poetry 1918 and "the collection called, Twelve Poets"? From Fletcher pass through the sullen backbiting of A.C.H., as if sand had gone to her head, to all the vacuities of an Untermeyer controversy. For relief turn to new sources, a terrific jumble of assininity (in *The Modern School*) under the heading, **NEW POETRY**, signed by some godless Frank V. Anderson! A Reedy's Mirror printing only poems of topical and political interest. **A GREAT REFORM PAPER**, *The Liberator*, printing such ataxic drivel as Sandburg's, *Liars*. Even from the hand of an artist, Carl, such stuff is inexcusable. **THE MIDLAND**, dealing with the middle west! And that pink harp bespangled atrocity **THE LYRIC** with these two aeschylusean titles on the front page, **FALLEN WORLDS** and **LIFE AND DEATH** (the first eleven lines of which latter piece happen to be well written). And these people are having a prize contest with **WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAIT**, Marguerite Wilkinson and samuel roth as judges—and no one cares!—and the number of books submitted to the contest approaches the 300 mark—and the last week may bring in another hundred—**BRRRRRRRR**. The same page brandishes another heading: **ON WITH THE PROPAGANDA FUND!** which due to a pale O I mistook to be **ON WITH THE POP GUN FUND!** Thus we see that poetry is flourishing since the renaissance of 1902. And there are other magazines and critics. But Geoffrey Parsons who runs a column in the *New York Tribune* every Sunday, a silent column of readable verse, is worthy of attention. Where does such a man have to keep himself? Why is it not possible for him to be editor of some worthwhile sheet? And the *Literary Digest*, the most popular college paper in America: it also runs a contemporary verse section. **THE PAGAN**: a filthy first three pages about a man named Joseph Kling and what he wants to sell you and what he has sold you, with an overful table of contents and **THEN** a story by J. P. Jacobsen, translated from the Danish, of such fine feeling that one is ashamed for it as one is ashamed for a lady who has to go into the wash room of a railway station.

That's all very well but it's no joke. How IS one to go about getting something done in this welter?

In the first place—although it was not true five years ago—all the "good stuff" there is to print does somehow get upon the

page in some crazy fashion today. Or to be more exact, among them the various poetry magazines and magazines that print poetry do achieve some kind of a reading for whatever really good stuff they have the intelligence to put upon their pages. But what the devil do I care for that? OF COURSE they do that much. The American editorial—and critical mind is hipped on the question of “good stuff” especially if it be “lovely.” But for the reason that American editors, critics, publishers do no more than this they merit only to be branded and ignored.

And now they are praising H. L. Davis', *Primapara*. They are good songs. Nothing could be lovelier than, *The Sweet Tasting, Running Vines in a Field, A Field by the River*—“leaves . . . like money spinning”, —“the light of their dresses between quick willow leaves”—Oh damn loveliness. Poets have written of the big leaves and the little leaves, leaves that are red, green, yellow and the one thing they have never seen about a leaf is that it is a little engine. It is one of the things that make a plant GO.

Perhaps Jean Starr Untermeyer IS a great poet but certainly no one could guess it from the disease of such criticism as that by F. V. Anderson in *The Modern School* or even from Amy Lowell's ginger pop in *Poetry*.

Perhaps a man does get a bellyache at 19, perhaps he does run to verse for aid, perhaps the result is a lovely poem, perhaps it does sooth the critical faculties of a hundred good people afflicted with similar bellyaches. But I deny that this has anything to do with the question as between excellence and mediocrity.

I deny that one writes because he cannot live. Carnevali is wrong. Truth will not kill poetry. Art is NOT a bastard thing. I would write no matter what other choice I had. An artist is NOT forced out of life, he refuses it. He does so wilfully. He writes in order to escape the mechanical perfection of sheer existence. He writes to assert himself above every machine and every mechanical conception that seeks to bind him. He writes to free himself, to annihilate every machine, every science, to escape defiant through consciousness and accuracy of emotional expression. And this can never occur until he is conscious of and takes discriminating grips upon the first brains of his generation.

Mencken would have every poet killed at 26 beating Osler's more democratic dictum by 34 years. This sounds exactly like what it is, the braying of a superficial jackass.

Aldington cannot understand that one need not PREFER *La Grosse Margot* (Aldington's, *Letter to La Grosse Margot*, in *The Dial*) to *Heliadora* in order to write good poetry. Even in the flare of such a life as Villon's he remains blind so that perhaps after all one has to pardon American editors their taste for loveliness—

myrrh-tressed *Heliadora*

bah, bah, bah, bah! I repeat Villon's curt answer:

Vente, gelle, gresle j'ai mon pain cuit.

And Aldington, “We do not need to interpret this horror in con-

fused geometric shapes of sullen color or to torture the Muse's mouth to the utterance of harsh discords." Fresh fish!

It is simply that the brains have not passed the mark set by the post-Darwinian botanists, etc. It is important not to ignore the Copernican theory, the voyage of Columbus, not because these things make a damned bit of difference to any one, especially to a poet, but because they stick unconsciously in a man's crop and pervert his meaning unless he have them sufficiently at his fingers' tips to be ware of them. And the mark of a great poet is the extent to which he is aware of his time and NOT, unless I be a fool, the weight of loveliness in his meters. And I cannot see anything worth **striving for save greatness.**

These "lovely" singers are the peasants of the world and have a peasant's feeling for lovely ladies. I have long suspected it and now I am convinced. These chance lovely poems (I must omit Aldington) are the singing of a peasantry. It is this singing that America is witnessing. It is this that biases ALL our criticism. It is upon this basis that the judgment which prompted Mencken's remark is made: thoughtless singing. To think means to stop singing only when you deny the power of release in thought.

Whatever can be said against her, and whatever can be said for Harriet Monroe who dug up good work when everyone else was sleeping, Margaret Anderson is the only one of them all who gets up a magazine which is not a ragbag.

I praise the Little Review. I praise Margaret Anderson. It is not necessary to agree with a man or woman in order to praise him. But it IS necessary to be envisaged by something DEFINITE and not a fogbank before one can praise it. I feel that M.A. has definitely made up her mind as to each thing she prints and that to the best of her ability she is striving to express in this way a definite SOMETHING, a something moreover that is the BEST that she knows how to do and not a conglomerate of what-is-expected-of-her. And being so The Little Review can never be a mere bundle of snippets, its aim to purvey the BEST tidbits, its great purpose to have something of everything on its bill of fare. It is at worst the expression of M. A's personality, the personality of a woman of complete lack of judgment in literary matters. BUT she judges whole. She is limited ONLY by her own ignorance, her own stupidity and that is fine and rare in an editor. It is all with her the expression of a something COMPLETE. What she does is not an accident. She does not select a poem because it is lovely. If she finds something to praise it is for a constant, uniform and sustained reason. You can reject her and know WHY but unless you are stupid you cannot overlook what she is saying. She praises Mary Garden for the complete consciousness of her art, she omits to notice whether Mary's voice is lovely or discordant. BUT she implies that Mary does all there is to be done with the voice she has and that this is better than any one else is accomplishing on

the contemporary operatic stage. This is the BEGINNING of artistic criticism. Read the Little Review.

Granted loveliness, granted a world populated with Heliodoras, there IS something else worth trying for. Granted that I am obsessed with the futility of this American habit of hanging upon the lips of loveliness. Say I cannot write as well as Davis, I have not the *locale*, the stability, anything—the youth. My youth we'll say was crass, steeped in a mad ignorance. Yet I am not forbidden from singing. It is damnable nonsense to think to anchor a poet on his Byronic adolescence of body and mind or to think to grant him only the province of cynicism. I began when I was twenty. I BEGAN then. OTHERS saw its inception when I was thirty, when I had already proved a failure time after time. And yet I sing. And if my voice is cracked at least no one can HEAR singing as I can nor put it into the throat so perfectly. Whose throat is yours and which is mine if not the one into which I PUT the music. And I will fight to insist that I am not voiceless. I insist that it is I, I, I who PUTS the music into the throats of those in whom I HEAR my music.

I'll sing when the veins below my belly are clotted solid. If this were not true it would be the veins that sing and it is the veins that sing for the critics here, most of them, the veins of the belly. I am I and I am a song and that is all I am.

There IS a way to come through the loss of youth or first youth and the loss of love and the loss of everything and it is not a poem, one poem, it is not a folk *melange*. It is art.

I find matter for serious attention in Ezra Pound's discordant shrieking: to hell with singing the States and the plains and the Sierra Nevadas for their horses' vigor.

It is the NEW! not one more youthful singer, one more lovely poem. The NEW, the everlasting NEW, the everlasting defiance. Ezra has the smell of it. Any man can slip into the mud. Any man can go to school.

Perhaps I am a sullen suburbanite, cowardly and alone. Perhaps it is true that I have not seen the cocottes of Montmartre or the Lady Diana. Perhaps it is a preposterous longing for the wealth of the world. I sit a blinded fool, with withered hands stretched out into the nothingness around me. Perhaps this is a sickness. Perhaps what I call my singing is a stench born out of these sores. I deny that that makes any difference. AT LEAST I AM THAT. Or if the answer is that no one will listen to my singing or even call it singing I say that they cannot help listening and that—it doesn't matter one way or the other. Perhaps it is all a vain regret, an insane determination to walk forward and backward at the same moment, a clinging to a youth I never enjoyed except in mad athletic excesses and stillborn ecstasies of loneliness. AT LEAST IT IS THAT. At least I exist in that. Who shall say how I shall set down the words that will call up Heliodora? And this that I have set down hereabove, although it be identical in

every word, every sentence, disjointed and decomposed as it is and without answer—with that which I had set down ten years ago, it is for all that NOT the same for now IT IS COMPOSED and THAT is the answer.

To return to the critics: I bunch them all as one. They are all sophomoric, puling, nonsensical. Take the best of them, Aiken, A. C. H., Hackett, Amy Lowell, what do their criticisms amount to more than an isolated perception of certain values. They pick over the dead bones. Never is their criticism a new SIGHT of a SOURCE, a flash into the future of art, wings under which a poet might spread his sparrow's wings and mount to the sky! They SEE nothing. It is never a confidence in the purgation by thought. It is a puling testiness in most cases or a benign ignorance in others of the purpose of the work with which they are dealing. Imagine a man actually sensing the inspiration that is in a poem. Never. His path must be sopped of rain water, the edges cut free of even the long grass, the way paved and SWEPT before an American critic will walk into a new work. Where is a man who has a head for smashing through underbrush? I not only want him I demand him. With the help of a real critic the work that even such a small group, such an inadequate group as the OTHERS could swing would have at least the beginnings of that splendor which—would be so out of place in America, like J. P. Morgan's watch chain! There is not the whisper of protest. There are only salaried employees of GREAT magazines who try to get radical stuff into their master's periodicals when they are able to or the budget allows.

All the critics appear to see is a lineless ghost which they are sure is GREAT and which they are equally sure that some living scrivener IS NOT. So they must drop back and do the best they can for us. Does it ever enter their heads that the benefits of thought are not ENTIRELY denied them because they happen to be Americans. They never glimpse the possibility, vague I admit, that they have a chance TO LEAD! They prefer the safe belly posture when the shrapnel is bursting. Any man can lead the world if he have the courage, the insight, the brains. Not to wish to lead is to acknowledge the impossibility of having the intelligence. We are gifted among the critics of this country with men and women of neatly tailored servility.

It is accurate enough to plead lack of knowledge. Yes, the sheer knowledge is lacking. I do not ask a critic to come out of dense ignorance and exceed the best informed Frenchman or German in Paris or Munich. I ask only for them to conceive the POSSIBILITY of thought. It is not necessary to know EVERYTHING in order to begin a thing. I even deny the overwhelming advantage to a thinker of a head packed with stratified information. Some insurgence of thought is necessary but even a DESIRE to think would be welcome.

Let the men and women associated under the name OTHERS

be called inadequate poets unworthy of thought. That does not absolve a critic from THINKING. Say the discussion is upon the merits of certain poets who write free verse: the statement is made that a poet is a poet whether he write in free verse or not and that it is just as easy or EASIER to write poor stuff in free verse as in the other variety. Jesus Christ! if this isn't the piddling of a microcephalic what then is it? It is TRUE, it is overwhelmingly TRUE but for Christ's sake what has it got to do with writing poetry? I ask in Christ's name where is someone who knows something about free verse and who will point out its excellences over any other sort in those departments where it possesses these excellences. Where is an analyst to state the perfections that can be achieved in free verse and in no other way? When this has been done, when some ONE american critic has BEGUN to think, then and then only will any man have a right to say what is good and what is not good, then only will someone be able to say that I am a good or a bad poet.

There are a few men and women writing poetry, a few poets who are perfectly conscious of what they are doing, who are not idly dabbling in a new form because it is new but who are writing in free verse because it is the ONLY form that approximates the meaning which after mature thought they are trying to put forward. It is easy to be understood if you do that which is stale. But free verse is the ONLY form that CAN CARRY THE NEW MEANING that is imperatively required today. It is the ONE verse form that embodies the quality of thought which can be designated as modern. And it is only the modern which is worth expressing. The denotations, the connotations of all this, the side-light it casts on religion on philosophy on abstract thought—these things exist and they are important and no poet has the time or the ability to go into them.

But a critic will waste hours on this or that UNDEBATABLE quality in a poem or a new book of poems: is it passionate or colorful or lewd or SUBTLE or does it exhibit a predilection on the poet's part for uxorious seclusion or nomadic profligacy or indeed does the poet wear pink silk underwear or blow his nose thumb fashion?

What the hell do I care if a man or woman is or is not passionate or tender with his children or loves his wife or she her husband or whether he is dramatic, lyrical, whether his lines are short or long, whether he writes of Tahiti or Back Bay, whether he represents the negro race, the Chinese, the river rat? BUT has he a vision into the desolate PRESENT. Love, yes, but love as it is affected by the violence of present day thought: music, yes, but music as it is affected by the present day revelations concerning the dead or living idolatries of yesterday. I don't give a damn about airplanes and airplane poetry but I do give a damn about the distraught brain that must find its release in building gas motors and in balancing them on cloth wings in its agony.

It is NOT true that we can sing the old songs. The old poetry will NOT do. Its whole form is inadequate, it is lousey with mediæval filth. It is NOT true that Whitman will do—

Clean, new! clean as the tread of a locomotive wheel—

Modern criticism that I am able to find is characterised by a deadly fear for the future. It is true that modern verse has its cliches just as the old did, it is important to say so, it is important for the bad writers to realize that they are bad writers—but it is sickening to hear NOTHING ELSE.

Maybe the critics have more to say than we realize and that they are toning down their talk to our ears! Let them give their generous imaginations the throttle. We are starving for splendor. We will crawl weakly after them as best we can.

Or better than that! I ask the critics only to comment on that which comes to them second hand, on essays about poetry or let them mouse over the personal qualifications of some anthology purveyor. Or they may be licensed to notice and discourse upon the ramblings of some ignorant Yale professor and his purblind excursions into a movement of which he is as uninformed as is one department of a university of another across the quadrangle. This is the very proof needed of the scientific quality of the ignorance we are facing.

And what does it lead to, this simmering of shallow kettles. It leads to certain "necessities." It generates a demand for a certain type of work. It has about it the seductive quality of pretty undergarments. It leads to a Maxwell Bodenheim doing "essays" so stale, so devoid of the vaguest hint of his whileome poignancy of feeling that a NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW accepts and pays for one of them.

What good in God's name can come from this sort of thing? Does a man not SEE that he is stripped bare, shaved and gelded before he is permitted to appear before that audience? Is it not a sign in itself that he is impotent, empty handed, that he has allowed himself to be subverted?

If it must come to that I prefer Ezra Pound to anyone. Say the man is dead, say he began to die the first time he set foot on a gangplank. He at least went abroad rather than do something worse. He went because he HAD to. He went because it was too easy to remain in this country. I wish he were here today. He was not always dead and so HE CANNOT BE DEAD NOW.

I am not one damned bit interested in socialism or anarchy but I am interested and deeply interested in the brain that requires socialism and anarchy and brings it on, just as I am interested in morbidity—a release, an assertion, a necessary release an imperative assertion. And I want Ezra Pound in this country because coated over as it may be he has INSIGHT into this brain.

But if my judgment is infirm in this matter it only further emphasizes the need.

It is the youth, I have seen written somewhere, that won the war: it is to the youth then that we must look for the energy that will carry us—etc., etc. The devil with youth! What does youth care or what do I care for it? What significance has youth? Whence does this wished for energy of youth come except from youth's blackness of heart and fresh muscles. It is a lie that there is any significance in youth because the brain is young. The new is not in any way related to the work of a BEGINNER but to that of a MASTER. He is young. He is the unborn.. It is perhaps even impossible for him to have his critics. What is the difference between 17 and 70? I see none save a certain hardening and weakening of the flesh. There are far more important differences between individuals of the same age than that. And the need IS GREAT for the perception of these differences.

Of what significance is it to blazon a name of such dimensions as that of John Dewey on the editorial page of a paper: IN CHARGE OF THE RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM: If you ignore the interdependence of thought and art, if you fail to adopt an enlightened, fully awake policy toward one of the major arts in a living phase instead of a sapless policy of makeshift? But what of John Dewey? Say that he doesn't give a damn about THE DIAL, that he is interested only in his section. My God is that not sufficient condemnation of the whole scheme he would advocate? If he, a hard thinker, do not stand on his feet and DEMAND excellences in anything that he is associated with it is an aspersion on the quality of his conception, that it has not the intelligence one would have expected from the semi-barbarous Irish of Emaine or a primitive Confucius. It is a stigma upon the nature of modern inquiry, this sort of approach toward a reconstruction. I DEMAND that John Dewey do something, not to wake up but to emplace an intelligence in his associates on THE DIAL that will give modern American poets an adequate opportunity to place upon paper in a paying magazine what they have to say. But why pick on THE DIAL?

I MUST demand what I do. I must fight back at the stupidity around me. I acknowledge inadequacy of information, elliptical statement, too vague generalizations SOMETIMES. I am not always a fair critic. I am a man doing that which does not fit his turn of mind. I think it important to state these things. A more able scholar, a cooler brain with a wider fund of information more acutely focused—since these things are unenlisted in the important matters which concern me I write to fill the gap, to emphasize a need which I don't know better how to make apparent.

W. C. W.

