

# the Phoenix Nest

## OUTLANDER

HE came a star-roamer  
From a cold fiery clime.  
He sang, a young Homer,  
Down dark streets of time,  
His brow scarred by lightning,  
His lip curled to bliss,  
His forest eyes frightening  
A sham world like this.

He crouched by the ocean  
And strummed a deep stove.  
The pinewood in motion  
Stepped down to the wave.  
The glassed wave reared swinging  
Its mantle foam-free,  
Spellbound by that singing,  
The fanged cobra sea.

The sun's pennoned glory  
Wrought pageants of sky.  
The dark promontory  
Flung a white gull on high.  
He sang golden-throated  
Sidereal rhyme  
Of chaos world-moted  
And the dream we call time.

When lamps lit the village  
He strolled through moon-shade.  
Their trawling and tillage  
He hummed, and their trade.  
They turned, craning after,  
Then near or afar  
Followed jostling with laughter  
His lilting guitar.

By the green and the churches  
He swerved up the hill.  
He climbed as one searches  
For a cynosure still,  
Till high above steeple,  
Branch-black on the moon,  
He turned toward the people  
And plucked forth a tune.

They saw Borealis,  
They saw comets fly.  
Dream pasture, dream palace  
Stood clear in the sky.  
A deep chord was aching  
To tears in each breast.  
A great wave was breaking  
And thundering to rest.

No later revealing  
Quite made it come right  
As to why they were kneeling  
On Hill Street that night.  
They scrambled up, dusting  
Their knees, and stood still.  
They coughed, looked mistrusting,  
Then gazed up the hill.

Yet no one felt sillier,  
No soul found it vain,  
Now all things familiar  
Rushed round them again.  
Over orchard and arbor  
A star trailed and fell.  
The height above the harbor  
Said softly, farewell.

The following is from David Rankin  
Barbee of Washington, D. C.:

As a close reader of The Phoenix  
Nest (every issue), which I find  
stimulating, even when I furiously  
disagree with some of its pet diva-  
gations and divaporations, I was in-

terested to learn that John Wilkes  
Booth had played in a dramatiza-  
tion of Mrs. Southworth's novel,  
"The Hidden Hand." For more than  
forty years I have been studying  
the life of that errant but remark-  
able person and thought that I had  
a complete and accurate list of all  
the plays in which he had ever ap-  
peared. But it seems not, for Mr.  
Walbridge would hardly have said  
that Booth acted in "The Hidden  
Hand" if it were not so. Would you  
be so good as to publish where and  
when this took place?

It should not be a matter of won-  
der if Booth did produce this drama,  
for he was probably the sole actor  
of his day to try out new plays.  
There were no American play-  
wrights then writing tragedies or  
plays that would appeal to tragedi-  
ans, and so most of the latter fol-  
lowed the pattern of the English  
stage and presented the classic  
English dramas.

Booth was entirely different from  
the characterization of him that has  
crept into history. In the very latest  
summation of his personality and  
position as an artist we are told that  
he was "a second-rate actor, thwarted  
by the artistic superiority of his  
brother Edwin." This by one who  
has written his biography, who,  
however, promotes him eight grades,  
for formerly he was only a tenth-  
rate actor, and a drunkard to boot!

What did those who *knew* him  
say of all this? John T. Ford, who  
managed the elder Booth and his  
actor sons and grandsons, thought  
more highly of John Wilkes's talents  
than he did of Edwin's. "He would  
have made the greatest actor of his  
time had he lived," said the veteran  
manager. "His early performances  
were much better than Edwin's."

John Ellsler, who played with all  
the Booths, and who trained more  
fine actors than any stage director  
of his generation, when asked about  
this family of great tragedians,  
cried out that "John has more of the  
old man's power in one performance  
than Edwin can show in a year. He

has the fire, the dash, the touch of  
*strangeness* . . . Wait a year or two  
till he gets used to the harness, and  
quiets down a bit, and you will see  
as great an actor as America can  
produce."

The famous English comedian, Sir  
Charles Wyndham, from intimate  
personal knowledge, said of him:  
"As an actor, the natural endow-  
ment of John Wilkes Booth was of  
the highest. His original gift was  
greater than that of his wonderful  
brother Edwin."

And to dear old Mrs. Gilbert he  
was "the most perfect Romeo, the  
finest I ever saw."

Students of the theater know that  
Romeo is perhaps the most difficult  
role in the Shakespearean theatre  
to enact. The older Booth never  
tried it, because it was beyond his  
powers. Only two English actors  
ever succeeded in it—David Garrick  
and Spranger Barry. Edwin Booth  
failed in it so often that he had to  
withdraw it from his repertory. I  
assume that when an actor is "per-  
fect" in the role that few have suc-  
ceeded in, he is pretty near the top  
of his profession.

\* \* \*

Alice Haines Baskin of South Cata-  
lina Avenue, Pasadena, California,  
sends me:

## REGALIA

Silk of sorrow and thread of an-  
guish,  
The robe of courage is woven and  
worn;  
The jewel of honor, dew-bright at  
daybreak—  
Hangs on the blood-red thorn.

\* \* \*

The Word Weavers of Los Angeles  
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Los Angeles 5, California.

\* \* \*

Bernard M. Allen (Yale '92) writes  
me from Cheshire, Connecticut:

What started this letter was your  
reference to Heywood Broun, Bob  
Benchley, and the Sacco-Vanzetti  
case, and your poem. I was tre-  
mendously interested in the Sacco-  
Vanzetti case, attended the Dedham  
trial for three days, and felt obliged,  
at the end of the tragedy, to write  
some ironical verses to President  
Lowell of Harvard, chairman of the  
commission appointed by Governor  
Fuller (with reference to the fa-  
mous rhyme, "You've heard of the  
city of Boston—etc."):

When that ill-famed report was  
in the making,  
Which sent two guiltless men be-  
neath the sod,  
Was that a time the high-born  
college president  
Had talked with God?



I knew personally Mrs. Glendower Evans, Mrs. Winslow, and Gardner Jackson, to whom Vanzetti wrote letters later published. Lewis Gannett of the *Herald-Tribune* is another man who says what he thinks about the case whenever he has a chance. Your poem reminds me a little of Ralph Chaplin's "Mourn not the dead who in the cool earth lie . . . etc." [See "The Poetry of Freedom" p. 537—Ed.] You skin 'em alive in literary fashion and phrase, but I think you do the Laodiceans a little injustice. They were more or less warm, and most of your targets don't seem to get even up to that temperature. Incidentally, I've been teaching Latin in Phillips Andover for over fifty years. Got fired from Phillips for going to Lawrence to visit the strikers in '19 and getting whacked by a cop, but have run fairly high temperature most of the fifty years. I trust you'll pardon this mixed up screed. Any printed reference to the Sacco-Vanzetti case is apt to set me off. A member of the Harvard Law School faculty universally honored (Dean Pound, whose sister, Louise Pound, told me) has said that not a single member of that distinguished group of lawyers believed that either Sacco or Vanzetti had been proved guilty.

Mr. Allen also sends me the follow-

ing, the author C. M. A. Rogers. It appeared originally in *The Classical Outlook*:

#### ONE WORLD

"The universe is an unimaginable whole. I feel myself a humble instrument of the universal power. . . . and wish to be not merely a necessary but a willing instrument in working out the inscrutable end."

JUDGE OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

I am blood kin to all mankind I know.  
The stream that courses in my veins and yours  
springs from the infinite. Its ebb and flow  
are governed by a spirit that endures  
eternally. I go along the street, and where a thousand men, some weak, some strong,  
master and servant, kings and subjects meet,  
I find my kith and kin. These folk belong  
to me. For this I know and share the pride  
my brother feels for some fine end attained.  
His shame is mine, his hurt is pain to me,  
since blood and brotherhood are not denied.  
The stream flows on and will not be restrained,  
shaping its channel to infinity.

. . . I like what that says.  
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

## Margaret, Cecily and Veronica

By Margaret Stavely

Margaret, Cecily and Veronica,  
in white lawn dresses and blue sashes,  
plain black slippers and long cotton stockings,  
look down purely from their frame. Ashes

of all the dismal years between are blown  
away in bits no larger than slivers of air,  
since the picture of Cecily, Veronica and Margaret  
was hung up there.

The hours are gone, through which each followed  
her separate interest, each her own gentle art.  
The keyhole still exists where Margaret  
peered at a performance in which she took no part;

ran and told Cecily, who being deft  
at story-telling, exaggeration and drama,  
reiterated Margaret's description to Veronica.  
Outraged and frightened, Veronica told mama.

They were all beaten, bedded without supper.  
(In this decade no child must let her lips  
fondle such images!) Mama, puffing and breathless  
behind her bosom, applied the whips.

Margaret and Cecily, without much effort,  
grew up long ago, bore children, died.  
Upon their mantels, carved from yellow ivory,  
a statuette of monkeys squatted side by side,

dumb, deaf and blind. They were the fashion.  
Not many in their families paused to look  
at them too often, unless it were Veronica,  
a thin, shy spinster, behind a book

back in the shadows, who felt their accusation,  
knowing they waited for the night . . . the dream  
of turning toward him and his silver kisses . . .  
their composite assumption of his face . . . the scream . . .



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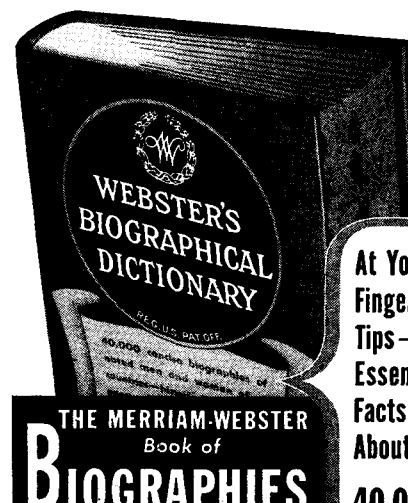
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