

Speed, We Say

By Muriel Rukeyser

SPEED, we say of our time: racing my writing word
The jet now, the whole sky screaming his name, Speed.
But I know rapider, someone hauling horizons in
Beside whom the racing of the suns seems tame.

I know faster than the flashing of suddenly recognized love
Or yellow spring going glimpsing his green fame,
Love after long suffering like inward lightning,
Assumed and lived through where now lovers lie warm,

Wild and at peace among their colors. Speed. And now
One quick-color mouth saying, "Now, love, now;
I have my spirit now, newborn and given,
The live delight;

It now is immediately not only spirit, not only mine, but
delight the forerunner
Of the depth of joy, most subtle, most rapid.
My two speeds, now, at last
Related, now at last in the same music—
Light running before light."



—Wood en-
gravings by
Isami Doi.

The Bear Who Came to Dinner

By Adrien Stoutenburg

WHERE he rows the dark
any door will do.
You can't keep him out;
he'll cellar through
keyhole or crack
on his bearded knees
if yellow once twangs
in your black like bees.
You can't keep him out
yet you can't have him in
like a cave in the house,
haunches and chin
dripping cold bees
on a Queen Anne chair,
moss to his ears,
and mildew for hair.
He'll thumb back your lids
in sleep for a lark,
breed moths in your bed,
and snore like a harp.
There's nothing he won't,
and nothing he will,
but he'll lug the whole dark
across your door sill.

The Toxicologist

By Leigh Van Valen

I AM a scientist,
A toxicologist, to be precise.
Often I treat a rabbit in its ear vein.
I then observe its spasms and rapid pulse,
Measure with care its movement and metabolism,
Kill it and note a petechial hemorrhage, lungs.
Quite routine, of course.
What's a rabbit, or a hundred, to human life?
Now last night something happened.
A rabbit bounded up the hill into a swarm of cars.
I swerved to avoid it and braked onto the grass.
The swarm passed, and there it lay,
Jerked clonically, shrieked softly.
I started toward it.
Another swarm approached, passed.
Now it lay quietly.
Later at home I checked the worksheets on ATS-4.
Something was wrong with them,
But I couldn't locate what it was,
And this morning they were quite correct.

Nothing

By Robert Graves

NOTHING is circular,
Like the empty centre
Of a smoke-ring's shadow,
That colourless zero
Marked on a bare wall:
Nothing at all,
And reflected in a mirror.

Then need you wonder
If the trained philosopher
Who seeks to define **NOTHING**
As absence of anything,
Who thinks more logistically
Than, above, do I
(Though my terms are cosier),

And who claims he has found
That **NOTHING** is not round,
Or hardly ever,
Will run a brain-fever
To the precise degree
Of one hundred and three
On Fahrenheit's thermometer?

Saga Out of Vinland



"The Dark Sister," by Winfield Townley Scott (New York University Press. 115 pp. \$3.95), is a saga about Leif Ericson's half-sister, Freydis, and the Viking explorations to the new world. Reviewer John Holmes is a poet, critic, and well-known teacher.

By John Holmes

ONE of the few younger American poets who has the right to do a long poem is Winfield Townley Scott. He put his first roots down in E. A. Robinson, and his earliest growth, "Biography for Traman" (1937), showed it with some honor. "Wind the Clock" was pure Scott, that quiet voice saying plain words, the rhythm his own and stirring. These 1941 poems were all short. In 1942 he published the long poem, still more surely his own, "The Sword on the Table," a striking dramatic-narrative piece on Dorr's Rebellion, a century-earlier fight for the freedom Rhode Islanders thought they had. Then in "Mr. Whittier and Other Poems," in 1948, which is W.T.S. at his best, a long dramatic poem, "Hamlet and Hamlet," proved anew his skill. He was working even then, the news was, on "a narrative in verse, based on a Norse legend related to the Vinland of early America." Ten years is hard waiting for some more short poems as surface-simple, and sudden to open deep and wide, as "Annual Legend," "The U.S. Sailor with the Japanese Skull," or "Fine Morning" or "Swedish Angel," and we still wait.

Scott's newest book, his seventh, is "The Dark Sister," a saga not only because it is about Leif Ericson's half-sister, Freydis, and the Viking explorations to the new world, but because in this poet's language, narration, and sweep a saga truly rises out of Vinland. The hero is not human, but infinitely greater, the land itself bigger than all the human beings who came to it or were to come for centuries. Scott's descriptive passages of weather, forests, the sea, are more the climate of the poem than "passages," but they thrust under our very feet and into our blood. And if there is no hero, as such, there certainly is a heroine, though perhaps not as such. Freydis is the supreme bitch

in literature, man-hating, self-centered, insatiably destructive, black-haired and black-hearted. She is mad and maddening, to the men in the story and to men as readers of this book. Her cold lust for power turns more and more pointless, her perverse treacheries more shocking, and her ultimate dissolution is only the extreme of an insanity that was frightening enough at the beginning. Freydis is real horror.

The story is of the voyage, off-season, of two ships from Greenland to the coasts of Northeastern America a thousand years ago, to bring back wood. On an earlier voyage, Freydis's half-brother, Leif Ericson, had left there the bones of two of his brothers, and some houses. Freydis wanted the houses, wanted Leif's fame, in fact wanted Leif, and moreover the command of both ships, the credit for the dangerous voyage, and the profit. Mad with her wanting, she drove mad and killed by having them kill one another, half her shipmates. She returned, and her strong body and will broke of its own terrible cold burning. Leif himself guessed the truth, and even her rivalry, a motive at least comprehensible, failed her. At the end nothing is left, and it was all for nothing: madness, emptiness.

BUT the two huge and unforgettable forces remain, as created by the poet, the dark destructive sterility of hateful hunger, and the far-shining beaches, "rising in salt-dazzle air . . . the leaves in the wind, the rustle of meadows," the abundance of earth itself unmined, uncut, unused, or lived in, not for centuries yet to be ravaged, named, dirtied, populated. Scott's realization in words of that clean, cold land and time is his triumph in this poem. It lives on in the mind, not because he is long in describing it, but because he has been there. We know with him the land

Like something secret the sun
nourished; like no land
man-founded,

Rising in stone-bright shores, in
beaches slung below green
bluffs, beyond in-running
waves,

Shining fronded and richly
weeded, firred, and over
immaculate meadows that
widened and burned

All the way to the woodside:

Birch among beech against oak
into pine and the wind-flood
through them always

Like a land-tide, a golden surf
shoulder-deep like a noon
ocean.

Though it was ten years in the making, it has been worth it. "The Dark Sister" is one of the most magnificent long poems of our time, for the power and cathartic terror of its story, for the evocation of a past beyond reach till now, and for the range of its effects through language that with equal skill handles character, physical action, seascape and landscape, bawdy humor and superhuman viewpoint. Scott as dramatic narrator moves every figure and works every scene with excitement, whether of bloody human fury or nature's huge being. As poet he performs with a mature certainty, his style bodied full, a man in his prime moving powerfully.

Off-Beat Bard

"Gaius Valerius Catullus: The Complete Poetry," translated by Frank O. Copley (University of Michigan Press. 141 pp. \$3.75), provides a new version of the Roman poet's use of the vernacular.

By Selden Rodman

OF ALL the Graeco-Roman poets it can be said of Catullus alone that nothing stands between him and us but the language. Witty, neurotic, off-beat, fiercely personal in his hates as well as in his loves, contemptuous of tradition, he has above all that sense which is ours that nothing stands between the cynicism of public life and the stale comfort of the academy but the defiant gesture of the artist. In the words of his latest translator, he "released Latin poetry from an exclusive devotion to war, history, mythology, and astronomy. . . . He saw the co-gency and power in the ordinary spoken language of Italy. . . . He knew that even the polite formula and the dull cliché had their poetic uses."

To render such a poet (for that matter, any poet) into a living language, two minimum requirements must be