HELICON

1955

THE HELICON

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

JUNE, 1955

"From *Helicon's* harmonious springs a thousand
rills their mazy progress take."

Gray: *The Progress of Poesy*

Helicon 1955

A Note from the Editor

The editor wishes to thank the editorial board and the contributors for their assistance in preparing this issue of the *Helicon*.

MARY N. BURNS

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Widow's Walk

The old house still stands on the river road. It's empty now. Folks don't pass by it much since the state built the new highway past Wainport. About the place there is a loneliness that comes of its not being occupied. The house leans to windward, and the porch long ago gave up the struggle against gravity, and it now sags complacently to the ground. Far back as most folks can remember, the house has been like that, but I can remember a time when smoke curled lazily from the chimney, and old Mr. Rogers' longjohns danced on the clothesline.

In those days, around five o'clock in the afternoon, folks hereabouts used to see Mrs. Sabina Rogers headed for the railroad station. She had her old horse, Bess, hitched to the carriage, and she'd come driving down the river road past all the other farmhouses on her way to town. She'd stop by our house once in a while, and Ma would walk out to the gate to her, and they'd chat awhile and then Mrs. Rogers would say

— Well I'd better be gittin' on to pick up my man.

Ma would just nod sad-like and then Mrs. Rogers would slap the reins, and old Bess would start trotting down the road lickety-split, kicking up little whirls of dust with her hoofs as she went.

The day I want to tell you about was different from the rest. Seems that Mr. Rogers had taken up with some woman in the city where he worked, and he was fixin' to leave Mrs. Rogers. Everybody knew about it exceptin' Mrs. Rogers, herself. Ma said if she ever found out it would like to kill her: her being so frail and sickish.

Well, it had been going on that way for quite some months, folks knowin' what was happening, and all of them afraid to do anything about it. I was in town the day things came to a head. Mr. Rogers got off the five o'clock train as usual, and he paced the station platform for a good quarter of an hour before Mrs. Rogers showed up. It weren't like her to be late. Enoch and me, we watched him in front of the general store. Everybody along Main Street was kinda' excited, and every once in a while they'd cast furtive glances down at the train station. I ain't never seen a day when so many people went into the train station to get a time schedule like they did that day. You could tell something was wrong just by the way Mr. Rogers kept pacing back and forth on the station platform. I bet he knew just how many planks there were in the platform by the time Mrs. Rogers arrived.

About quarter after five the carriage come rolling down Main Street,

Bess, the mare, was all lathered up, and Mrs. Rogers sat in the driver's seat, her back as stiff as a poker, and her face all white and screwed up as if she were intending to cry. Mr. Rogers hopped off that station platform real fast, and he was in the carriage, and had it headed out of town before anybody knew what happened. All folks seem to remember is the bewildered, hurt look on Mrs. Rogers face as Mr. Rogers snatched the reins from her hands.

Enoch and me started home then, and the storm that had been brewin' all day, overtook us on the road. It was a warm rain, but the way the wind lashed it about, we were pretty soon soaked through. After that we didn't mind much, and we walked home real slow.

The storm was something fierce toward dusk, and it blew the hen house all the way down to the south pasture. Pa and I had some time gathering up all the stray hens next morning, what with the gloominess and the sudden little squalls of rain.

Even with the storm and all, Mrs. Rogers was right at the station next morning taking Mr. Rogers to the train. She passed the south pasture around seven that morning, and Pa called to her, but she didn't pay no heed. The oilskin curtains were drawn tight around the carriage top so all I really saw was her hands clenched on the reins, in case Old Bess, the mare, shied at one of the branches felled by the storm. Pa called out once again, and when she didn't reply, we started gathering the hens again.

Most folks didn't see her that morning. The people along Main Street were all inside huddled about the log fires thawing out the dampness from their bones. A few saw the carriage pull up and halt in front of the station, and the stationmaster recalls saying hello to Mrs. Rogers after the train pulled out, but even he was hurrying over to the general store to get a plug of tobacco before the next train was due, so he didn't recollect much of importance.

What most folks recall about that day is the way the sun broke through about three o'clock, and towards five there were dried out pot holes where the rain had settled earlier that day.

It was shortly before five that Sabrina Rogers came into town. As usual she stopped at the train station, and waited. The train was late, and when it did come in, Mr. Rogers didn't get off. They say Mrs. Rogers just sat watching the passengers get off, she didn't speak to anyone. She just sat staring straight ahead, her lower lip trembling. Mrs. Jackson, the proprietoress of the general store, wanted to go over and speak to Mrs.

Rogers, but Mr. Jackson told her not to be a damn fool, and not to go buttin' into other folks business.

After a while Mrs. Rogers gave up waitin' and started back towards home. But that weren't the last of Mrs. Rogers, not by a long sight. For years she kept comin' into town at five in all kinds of weather half expecting Mr. Rogers to get off the five o'clock train. He never did. Folks around town figured her mind had snapped, with what had happened and all, so they didn't bother her much, except for a few sassy kids who hollered taunts at her, and they soon stopped.

Spring planting gave way to summer growth that year, and when the harvesting came in the fall it were the first time I actually saw Mrs. Rogers to speak to again.

Enoch and me decided to go swimming one day that fall. We went to the old picnic ground back of Mrs. Rogers' place, down by where the old ice house used to be. The water was real chilling, and Enoch was diving off the ice house ramp that jutted over the lake — making a real fool out of himself — when he cut his foot on a nail in the planks. He bled something awful. I tied the sleeve of his shirt around the foot, but it didn't stop the bleeding any. We started for home, Enoch hobbling along beside me, and me right scared that he was gonna' bleed to death. Enoch looked awful pale, and it was then I got the idea of stopping at Mrs. Rogers' place to see if she could do something for Enoch's foot. At first, Enoch, hurt and all, wasn't wantin' to go, but I convinced him it were the best thing.

Mrs. Rogers were nice and polite when we got there, and she asked Enoch and me to come in. She washed Enoch's cut with some spring water and put some kinda' salve on it before bandaging it up. She asked us if we had anything to eat, and when we said no she told us to set a spell while she got us something. I noticed then that there were two places set at the table, and I figured out right away that one must be for Mr. Rogers. I felt kinda' peculiar then, but not for long. Mrs. Rogers busied herself about the stove, and her hound dog lay by the stove, his head nodding now and then, and all the time his soulful eyes following Mrs. Rogers as she moved about the kitchen.

While we were eating, the dog started thumping away with his tail, wagging it against the stove leg, and when Mrs. Rogers set his food out he got up and walked over to her. Sabrina reached down and petted the hound absentmindedly. The way he looked up at her you could tell he was real content.

After we had finished eating, the widow told us she would take us home seeing it was getting on to five. We followed her out of the house. She had some difficulty hitching the horse to the carriage, because of the black shawl she wore about her shoulders. I wanted to help her, but she refused, saying she'd managed by herself all these years, and she weren't gonna' start depending on someone else at this stage of the game. I remember that I wondered then if it was Mr. Rogers she were referring to.

We rode home in silence. The early fall twilight coming on fast. It was a remembering time; not a talking time.

Mrs. Rogers left Enoch and me off in front of the house. She bid us goodbye, saying she'd enjoyed our company and to stop by again sometime. Enoch went into the house, then, but I stayed behind watching Mrs. Rogers drive down the road, her thin back bent forward, and her shoulders hunched under the black shawl. I watched her until the dusk closed in on her. Then I turned and went slowly back to the house.

Mrs. Rogers kept on for several years after that, traveling to town every day at five, and people got used to her, and didn't disturb her. It was four years after Mr. Rogers left, and three and a half since I last spoke to Mrs. Rogers that things changed. One day she never showed up at the usual time. Folks got real worried, and after a spell, a few of the townspeople set out for her house on the river road.

They found her in front of the kitchen stove, and the fire had long since gone out, the hound dog was whining over the body. The dog was bewildered by what had happened. The doctor said it looked like Mrs. Rogers had died of a heart attack, and God knows how long the dog had stood guard over the body. The dog wouldn't allow anyone to go near Mrs. Rogers until one of the men coaxed him outside. They buried her the next day out in the old Methodist Cemetery, near where the new hardware store is nowadays.

Jeb Shaw bought the old house the next winter; that's how come I was there the day of the discovery. I was to help Jeb with the plowing of the pasture lands on Mrs. Rogers' place that spring.

The day I went it were a beautiful spring morning. The clouds were that pretty they seemed to be painted on the sky. It had rained the night before, and the whole land for miles around was clean-washed and sweet-smelling. When I crossed the brook down below the Rogers' place I saw the brook ferns being crushed and humbled by the onrushing waters, and they clung to the rocks and soft sand of the river bed.

As I approached the house it were nice to see smoke coming out of the chimney again. It gave it that lived-in look.

Jeb Shaw was out back of the house chopping wood, and so I sat there talking to him for a little while before we set out to do the plowing. His wife, Martha, came out just before we left and told Jeb not to forget to come up to the house for dinner for she weren't gonna' wait it for him.

Down in the pasture Jeb hitched the mules to the plow. He sure had a way with animals. I've seen the days Pa would get to cursing 'cause the mules wouldn't get into harness. Jeb just kept talking to them real soft and coaxing like, and he had them harnessed up in a jiffy.

The teeth of the plow cut deep into the earth turning up the rich soil as Jeb drew the mules about the pasture. We had about half of the pasture plowed when the teeth of the plow struck on something.

We started clearing the dirt away from the object then. I felt kinda' sick when I realized it was a body. The clothes of the corpse were all mildewed and rotten, and fell away to dust at a touch. The reason we knew it was Mr. Rogers was on account of the gold watch with his initial engraved on the inside cover. Jeb noticed that the crystal was broken, and that the hands of the watch still pointed to ten past six. We covered the body up with a blanket, and Jeb sent me into town to get the doctor and constable while he stood guard over the body.

By that night the news was all over town about our discovery of the body. The doctor said that death was due to a blow on the head. It didn't take long for people to figure out that Mrs. Rogers had done the killing. Folks felt kinda' sheepish realizing that she'd fooled them all these years. They guessed that it must have happened that day long ago, the day that Mrs. Rogers had been so late in coming to pick up her husband. Some of them even said that she must have known all along that Mr. Rogers was carrying on with another woman, and that she planned the murder of her husband.

The Shaws moved out of the house on the river road a few months later; they just didn't like the idea of staying on in a house where a thing like that had happened. The house hasn't been lived in since.

* * * *
* * * *

That all happened years ago, but some nights when the heat of spring causes one to lie awake remembering, I can hear the sound of horses hoofs

and creaking of a carriage as it passes down the river road. I get up then, and walk over to the window and look on the moon-washed road. There is no one there, and yet it would seem that a carriage has just passed, and I listen for the dying echo of the horses hoofs in the distance. But there is only silence, and the soft scratch of the tree branches against the eaves of the house.

It is then I recall Mrs. Rogers. And the thing I remember most of all is an old gold watch with a broken crystal, and the hands, forever pointing to ten past six. And in the stillness of the spring night I begin to ask myself the old question. What happened on the day of the storm? Did the two of them, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, ride home in silence, or did they quarrel? Had Mr. Rogers told her of his plans to leave her, or had she already guessed what he intended to do? Could Mrs. Rogers have wielded the weapon that killed Mr. Rogers? It's then I recall how Ma used to say how frail and sick Mrs. Rogers was. And then remembering the violence of the storm, I begin to think that maybe Mr. Rogers was thrown from the carriage, and struck his head on a stone. That could have killed him. But what prompted Mrs. Rogers to hide the body? Fear? But what was there to be afraid of?

As much as I search in my soul for the answer, I still don't know. I can only surmise. And still I cannot forget the kindness of Mrs. Rogers to Enoch and me, and the dog's tail thumping lazily against the stove as his soulful eyes followed Mrs. Rogers about the kitchen. I can't give you any of the answers, you'll have to decide for yourself.

All I can do is remember Mrs. Rogers as she hitched old Bess to the carriage, and her shoulders hunched under the black shawl as she drove for the last time down the river road in the gathering dusk. Twilight is a remembering time; not a talking time.

DAVID DILLON

I See My Home Town Living

I see my home town living.
Oh, the many pictures
I see my home, an old brown philosopher,
Eyes alight as he gazes at the setting sun.
I see the maples growing,
Tall, stately and gnarled,
Constant companions of my home.
I see the brown Jersey cows grazing
Among the many cedar trees,
Oblivious to the singing of the birds,
The ripple of the brook,
The running of the rabbits,
And even of me.
I see the dogs playing
With the pure joy of being alive.
I see the young girls,
Their brown hair blowing in the breeze,
Looking toward the future,
Their eyes alight and happy,
Full of dreams and hopes.
I see the boys,
Strong and with sun-bronzed skin.
They're also looking toward the future,
One with excitement and danger.
And day by day
I see them filled with a growing restlessness.
I see the old folks, as they go about their work,
Now and then nodding in their affirmation.
And I see God,
Watching, guarding his universe.

BARBARA GIBAU

The Glass World

It's Labor Day and the remaining vacationers are asleep after last night's farewell-to-summer party. A girl wanders aimlessly at the water's edge. She scowls. A lovely day darkens.

Anne Bradley does not see the sun or the beach because within herself she is fighting fear. She is afraid because summer is over. The only sound she hears is the constant pounding of the surf — summer is over, summer is over. Even the breeze picks up the strain and carries it along as it skips over the sand — summer is over.

It's all over and there'll never be another summer like it. Why does there always have to be an end?

At the end of summer last year Anne had known that there would always be another one, but this year —

College she mutters. The very word sends chills up her spine. I don't want to go — I'm afraid.

An entirely new atmosphere, entirely different people — mature people. What if she didn't measure up? Would she change so much? Yes, she would never again be the same. She'd be grown up—going away to college.

But I guess everyone adjusts—still—

Would it happen the first day in college or maybe the first week? Would she be accepted in the crowd if she didn't change immediately?

Steve said not to worry.

Yes, Steve could say that; after all he would be a junior this year, and he didn't seem too different from all the other kids in the crowd.

But that's Steve. I know I'll change and I'm not ready yet to— to grow up so suddenly. Today, all this summer, and the summer before, I've been a teenager, you might say a kid, and next week I'll be an adult. I suppose Steve will even seem different. But the very mention of Steve made her glow inside.

She recalled all the beach parties with the burnt hot dogs and toasted marshmallows. She remembered the hot idle days filled with swimming and tennis and coke and Steve — most of all Steve. She recalled the lazy afternoons when they two were racing down the sun-drenched beach, side by side, to the rocks or strolling, hand in hand, near the

water's edge on a cool midsummer's night. Oh, and then there was last night — for last night was still summer — the "farewell-to-summer" party that she'd been attending along with all the other summer residents of the summer colony, every year since as far back as she could remember. Even that was different this year, somehow.

Steve had suggested that they walk the beach just once more. And they left the noisy crowd of people gathered in the fire station, and they came to sit on the rocks that rose out of the ocean like so many Druids and cast long black shadows over calm water. There Anne had awkwardly told Steve how she felt about going away to college and about their never having another summer like this one. But he had not felt the way he should have about the whole situation, or else he didn't understand, she kept telling herself.

"Anne," he had said, "The whole trouble is — that little glass world you live in. Some day someone is going to break it into little pieces for you. Sure, summer is over, but college is fun once you catch onto it. And next summer is going to be even better." He paused and then murmured softly, "Wait and see." Then he had kissed her and everything seemed all right.

However, when Anne got into bed that night she found she couldn't sleep, and matters didn't improve.

How does he know whether or not I'll ever see this place again, she murmured sleepily. After all, when one goes away to college, one never knows what might happen . . .

She dozed off and when she again opened her eyes, the sun was just rising out of the water. She dressed quickly and now here she was in the cool clear morning air — winter air — for now summer was over — and Steve was gone. He had left with his family at five o'clock.

Anne kicked at the sand, her turbulent spirit showing in her outer-self as she approached a small, grey, weatherbeaten shack on the beach, which was set up from the sand on rotted piling. She mounted the two makeshift steps and entered the small store.

The rough wooden floor sagged in the middle, the far wall was partially hidden by an orange crate counter, and the odor of freshly made coffee trailed out from the back room. A whitehaired old man, with skin toughened from exposure to the weather looked up as Anne crossed the floor toward him.

"Ye-es? Oh, it's you, Anne." He took a much-chewed pipe from between his teeth.

"I came for the paper, Mr. Yates," Anne said, almost mechanically.

"Oh, yes, but that's not all I have for ya," he winked. Anne regarded him questioningly.

"Yep," he continued. "That Miller fella' dropped by kinda' early this mornin'. Left this here envelope for ya — nice boy that . . ."

Anne heard no more. Her fingers worked impatiently at the envelope —

Anne,

Hope you're feeling better this morning. I guess we were both pretty upset last night. You probably think I don't understand what you're going through, but I felt something the same thing before I went away to college, too. Just a stage in growing up, I guess.

Always,
Steve

P.S.
I still love you . . .

Anne walked through the open doorway; looked up from the paper before her; and saw the sun for the first time that day as it smiled down on the tanned face. Then, she thought she heard a sound above the crash of the waves against the shore . . . like the tinkling of glass.

"It's gone," Anne said slowly. "It didn't break after all . . . just disappeared — disintegrated — like summer. And college will be wonderful, I just know it." She broke into a run across the beach, sand flying beneath her feet.

"Well, if that ain't the younguns all over," muttered old Bill Yates, shaking his head dolefully as he watched her swiftly retreating figure from where he stood in the doorway. "Went off without the Sund'y paper."

Helen Kerrins

This Is Not New

The tribunals, the mob,
the crowded jury
McCarthied is the world
Lonely the man who sees

Look at this spot of seeping hate
Catch the inquisitions over back-yard fences
and the devices in high places
But stare softly

For where are those who saw
who stared
but not softly?
Untimed
and solitary
sickled, trammelled
hewn down by the little ones
piled by those who would be big

Men are born with a dream
But it is soon imprisoned
chained by that madness, fear

Look back and see
a bullet for Ghandi
a sip of hemlock
and a dogwood tree.

John P. Wilson

Gnomon*

I lay awake one awful night,
After a moaning wind had fled,
Leaving the ruffles rippling,
To its expiring breath.

A shadow came!
Stood near my bed,
Stooping, placed a hand upon my head,
Imparting the coldness of the night.

The window rattled in its casement,
As air in useless throat;
And, in the darkness I found sight —
I went to sleep one awful night.

*Gnomon, which refers to the pointer on a sundial that casts the shadow, is here synonymous with God.

ROBERT FRAPPIER

I Had Forgotten

I had forgotten
The thrill of anticipation
In a new day;
The delight in unexpected
But hoped for encounter;
The feeling of warmth
In eyes held fast;
The surge of happy
Tremulous wonder.

I had forgotten —
Until I met you.

BARBARA GIBAU

When We Speak

When we talk of war, the apologetic ecclasiastic argued,
We must note the difference between just and unjust.
For our country demands that we kill in a just war.
And so we must because it is our nature to be ruled.
But we must not kill by fighting an unjust war
Because it has been written by the mystics: Thou shall not

We must reject the realist, who writes only for the sake of writing
Said the Victorian
The matters they scribble about are not part of real life,
For in real life we never talk about the things they write about.

When we think of our history,
We must give due consideration to the right of revolution,
Spoke the perceptive political scientist:
A revolution is certainly right
(For consider our own country)
If the conditions are right,
That is if they are 100 per cent American.

In the matter of de-segregation
Addressed the careful administrator,
We must also consider the social and economic barriers.

God break down these barriers
Which makes our minds the slave of our desires;
Free us from this sophistry which we call learning;
Destroy this intellectual prostitution which dilutes every honest idea.
Instead give us men with souls of strength
Who stand on their yea and their nay,
Who are honest with reality but can go beyond.
We have been fed too long on the apologies and justifications,
On twisting and warpings and slicings,
And nothing is its original.
Give a truth which will be no tongue's slave
And a speech which serves the idea.

JOHN P. WILSON

I Still Remain a Boy

I still remain a boy —
too young to understand
so many things;
and yet I tried,
O God, to lift the lids
of my unseeing eyes
for such a little while —
was this too much?
the reason why I failed?

I tried so hard at first
to make myself a man
by following the ray of light
that all too few can see
upon the path that leads
to greater, finer life,
although I knew I'd find
the thorn tree and the nettle
in battle with the light;
I also knew that battles were not won
by right alone,
that sweat and tears are oft
the price for being true
to God and to one's self.

All this I knew;
yet failed,
for while I searched, a wall sprang up
that soon o'er topped my head
and hid the world from view;
I found myself a stranger
who lived with loneliness,
an only friend.

And so I turned aside
and took the lesser path
in weakness.
O God, can loneliness
be worse than this?

HAROLD SIPPLES

From Opera to Music Drama

Since the beginning of the decade, more Americans have turned their cultural interests toward opera than ever before. This is evident from mounting box office receipts from all the leading opera companies in the United States. The fact that more people can enjoy opera through the new medium, television, and through superior orthophonic recordings has added to the "opera boom." The motion picture industry has made its contribution by filming biographies of such singers as Caruso, Chaliapin, Melba, Grace Moore and most recently Gertrude Lawrence. Opera favorites such as *Aida, Traviata, Carmen,* and *Tales of Hoffman* have been successfully filmed and many of our current hit parade tunes have been taken directly from the pen of Wagner, Verdi. and Puccini. In addition, the Curtis Institute of Music has given us its foremost pupil, Gian-Carlo Menotti, through whose genious the opera has not only flourished, but taken a new form.

During the past few seasons, opera has virtually invaded Broadway and for the first time in its glamorous history, theatre-goers and critics are using the term "music drama" along the Great White Way. This Renaissance, if you please, we owe deeply to Gian-Carlo Menotti, whose first Broadway triumph was his dramatic *The Medium,* which opened in 1947. It was during the 1950 season, however, that Menotti won wide acclaim for his powerful *The Consul,* which brought him the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics Award. This season, his most recent attempt, *The Saint of Bleecker Street,* which had a mildly successful run, brought the composer further laurels. His modern experimental form has started opera enthusiasts a-buzzing, and as Menotti's style continues to be well received, it may well be that the time has come for another transitional movement in music, and the United States may lead it.

Before going further, let me explain that the term "music drama" is not a new one. It was first employed by the great master of the opera, Richard Wagner, during the nineteenth century Romantic Period. Essentially, the difference is that "music drama" contains musical speech or endless dramatic dialogue, which is sung minus interruptions in the score, while opera contains a string of markedly separated arias rhythmically accompanied by the orchestra. Technically, whereas music may be termed an end in opera, it becomes a means in "music drama," wherein the orchestral score serves to intensify the dramatic dialogue and the action, thus unifying the music with the drama.

To give some examples of the techniques involved, I shall discuss *The Consul,* which I consider Menotti's best opera to date. The opera takes us behind the Iron Curtain to the home of a man hunted by the Red Consulate. Dissonant moans from the brass and percussions depict the helpless situation which the man's wife, Magda, must face. A crash in the orchestra brings the Red police who search the house. At their departure, a silence is followed by a tom-tom beating in the distance to heighten the suspense. At the end of the opera, which is perhaps its most terrifying moment, the pulsating drum becomes louder. Magda, devoid of all hope of ever escaping from the Red police state, releases gas jets, sounds of which are heard intensified in the string and percussion sections of the orchestra. As Magda breathes death, the telephone nearby rings. It is her husband calling. He has finally managed to escape from the Reds and will come for her soon. But it is too late. With each ring from the telephone, a loud pounding from the kettle drums is heard, penetrating as a cannon and increasing in volume until the climactic blast which brings the tragedy to a close. The tenseness built up in this opera is one that is unique in theatre annals because of the techniques employed to achieve that tenseness.

Gian-Carlo Menotti is still very young. There is no telling what his ideas may bring to the world. What Menotti has written so far has produced a decided effect on opera. What he plans to write may change its entire future.

JERRY DI IORIO

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