Classic Poetry Series

Eli Siegel
- poems -

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Eli Siegel(16 August 1902 - 8 November 1978)

Eli Siegel was the poet and critic who founded the philosophy Aesthetic Realism in 1941. He wrote the award-winning poem, "Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana", two highly acclaimed volumes of poetry, a critical consideration of Henry James's The Turn of the Screw titled James and the Children, and Self and World: An Explanation of Aesthetic Realism.

Life

Born in Latvia, Siegel's family came to the United States when he was an infant. He grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, where he graduated from the Baltimore City College high school, and lived most of his life in New York City.

In 1925, his "Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana" was selected from four thousand anonymously submitted poems as the winner of The Nation's esteemed poetry prize. The magazine's editors described it as "the most passionate and interesting poem which came in—a poem recording through magnificent rhythms a profound and important and beautiful vision of the earth on which afternoons and men have always existed." The poem begins:

> Quiet and green was the grass of the field,
> The sky was whole in brightness,
> And O, a bird was flying, high, there in the sky,
> So gently, so carelessly and fairly.

"Hot Afternoons" was controversial; the author's innovative technique in this long, free-verse poem tended to polarize commentators, with much of the criticism taking the form of parody. "In Hot Afternoons," Siegel later explained, "I tried to take many things that are thought of usually as being far apart and foreign and to show, in a beautiful way, that they aren’t so separate and that they do have a great deal to do with one another."

Siegel continued writing poetry throughout his life, but devoted the majority of his time over the next decades to developing the philosophy he later called Aesthetic Realism. After moving to New York City, he became a member of the Greenwich Village poets, famous for his dramatic readings of Hot Afternoons and other poems. His two-word poem, One Question, won recognition as the shortest poem in the English language. It appeared in the Literary Review of the New York Evening Post in 1925:

One Question
I —
Why?

For several years in the 1930s, Siegel served as master of ceremonies for regular poetry readings that were well-known for combining poetry and jazz. He was also a regular reviewer for Scribner's magazine and the New York Evening Post Literary Review. In 1938, Siegel began teaching poetry classes with the view that "what makes a good poem is like what can make a good life." In 1941, students in these classes asked him to give individual lessons in which they might learn about their own lives. These were the first Aesthetic Realism lessons.

In 1944, Siegel married Martha Baird (University of Iowa), who had begun studying in his classes the year before. Baird would later become Secretary of the Society for Aesthetic Realism.

In 1946, at Steinway Hall in New York City, Siegel began giving weekly lectures in which he presented the philosophy he first called Aesthetic Analysis (later, Aesthetic Realism) "a philosophic way of seeing conflict in self and making this conflict clear to a person so that a person becomes more integrated and happier." From 1941 to 1978, he gave many thousand lectures on poetry, history, economics — a wide variety of the arts and sciences. And he gave thousands of individual Aesthetic Realism lessons to men, women, and children. In these lessons the way of seeing the world based on aesthetics — which is Aesthetic Realism — was taught.

In 1951, William Carlos Williams read Siegel's "Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana" again, and wrote to Martha Baird: "Everything we most are compelled to do is in that one poem." Siegel, he wrote, "belongs in the very first rank of our living artists." The prize poem became the title poem of Siegel's first volume, Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana: Poems, nominated for a National Book Award in 1958. A decade later, his second volume, Hail, American Development, also met with critical acclaim. "I think it's about time Eli Siegel was moved up into the ranks of our acknowledged Leading Poets," wrote Kenneth Rexroth, in the New York Times. Walter Leuba described Siegel's poems as "alive in a burning honesty and directness" and yet, having "exquisite emotional tact." He pointed to these lines, from "Dear Birds, Tell This to Mothers":

Find the lost lines in
The writing that is your child, mothers. . .

At the age of 76, Siegel had an operation for a benign prostatic condition. He

called it "the operation so disastrous to me." As a result, he lost the use of his feet, and was unable to sleep. Five months after the surgery, with his health continuing to deteriorate, followers of his philosophy of Aesthetic Realism say that Siegel took his life. His suicide was described by Ellen Reiss in The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known wrote: "Mr. Siegel, as he lived, and also in dying, was true to the philosophy he founded: his purpose was to be fair to the world".

Aesthetic Realism

The basis of Aesthetic Realism is the principle, "The world, art, and self explain each other: each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites". In the book, Aesthetic Realism: We Have Been There, six working artists explain this principle in life and their own craft. Reviewing them, the Library Journal tells us: "Heraclitus, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and even Martin Buber have posited contraries and polarities in their philosophies. Siegel, however, seems to be the first to demonstrate that 'all beauty is the making one of the permanent opposites in reality'." (1 September 1969)

The ethics Siegel taught—"the art of enjoying justice"—includes this definition of good will: "The desire to have something else stronger and more beautiful, for this desire makes oneself stronger and more beautiful". Good will is necessary, he stated, for a person to like him– or herself: "This desire is the fundamental thing in human consciousness". (The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known, issue no. 121)

The Aesthetic Realism Foundation continues to teach the philosophy that Siegel founded. The Foundation gives consultations in New York and by telephone internationally

Comments on Siegel's Work

William Carlos Williams was an early supporter of Siegel's poetry and defender of his views. Williams wrote:

> I can't tell you how important Siegel's work is in the light of my present understanding of the modern poem. He belongs in the very first rank of our living artists.

And Williams continued:

> The other side of the picture is the extreme resentment that a fixed, sclerotic mind feels confronting this new. It shows itself by the violent opposition Siegel

received from the "authorities" whom I shall not dignify by naming and after that by neglect ("Something to Say", ed. by J.E.B. Breslin, New Directions).

In Contemporary Authors Ellen Reiss, academic head of the Aesthetic Realism Foundation, stated (in a book published by Definition Press, said Foundation's publishing arm):

Eli Siegel's work, which in time became Aesthetic Realism, was the cause of some of the largest praise, the largest love in persons, and also the largest resentment... In writing an entry about [him] for Contemporary Authors, you are somewhat in the position you would be writing an entry on the poet John Keats in 1821. That is, if you were to rely on what was said of Keats by most established critics (critics now remembered principally for their injustice to one of the greatest English writers), you would present the author of `Ode to a Nightingale' as a presumptuous `Cockney poet' whose works were `driveling idiocy.' In writing about Eli Siegel [now], you are writing about a contemporary who is great; who all his life met what William Carlos Williams described him as meeting, `the extreme resentment that a fixed, sclerotic mind feels confronting this new'; who now, after his death, is beginning, just barely beginning, to be seen with something like fairness.

Huntington Cairns, Secretary of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., described Siegel's place in the understanding of aesthetics—the branch of philosophy which studies beauty—as follows:

I believe that Eli Siegel was a genius. He did for aesthetics what Spinoza did for ethics.

Donald Kirkley wrote in the [Baltimore Sun|Baltimore Sun] (1944) reporting on Siegel's reaction to his 1925 national fame,

Baltimore friends close to him at the time will testify to a certain integrity and steadfastness of purpose which distinguished Mr. Siegel... He refused to exploit a flood of publicity which was enough to float any man to financial comfort..."

And William Carlos Williams also wrote,

Only today do I realize how important that poem ["Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana"] is in the history of our development as a cultural entity."

In 2002 the city of Baltimore placed a plaque in Druid Hill Park to commemorate the centennial of Eli Siegel's birth. That same year Representative Elijah E.

Cummings read a tribute to Siegel in the United States House of Representatives.

Epigraph

The following are lines from Hot Afternoons Have Been in Montana, one of the poems which Selden Rodman wrote "say more (and more movingly) about here and now than any contemporary poems I have read". (17 August 1957 Saturday Review) These lines stand for what Ellen Reiss has described as Siegel's "beautiful, faithful, passionate, critical, loving attention to the world and humanity".

The world is waiting to be known; Earth, what it has in it!
The past is in it;
All words, feelings, movements, words, bodies, clothes, girls,
trees, stones, things of beauty, books, desires are in it;
and all are to be known;
Afternoons have to do with the whole world;
And the beauty of mind, feeling knowingly the world!

And There Prevail

Brooklyn the gorgeous,
The southern Nineveh,
Where once on fields near an ocean not to be named now, prowlers, aborigines (Mr. Peckham) went about; and later not one of these got into learned books many of them now in Brooklyn by the Sound.
How few, few persons, prowling or others, get, feet, spirit and all, into books; take the form, they, these feeling objects, of print now neatly reposing in the learned hush of cities.
Dissoluteness is in Brooklyn and how few, few depraved people are remembered.
Brooklyn has all of Nineveh's sins, otherwise in the disposition by existence of sins and sin-having powers, there would be a Frightful, Cavernous, not-to-be dreamed of thing in logic (Miss Welsham perhaps talking).
It was logic Asshur-bani-pal used in the smiting and smiting of his Oriental foes, and the putting to great, various pains of his smitten, living foes.
Beings in Brooklyn have thought of Nineveh, and seemingly in a fashion, Nineveh knows not of Brooklyn.
Brooklyn doesn't know everything in altogether free depravity and knavery, but no place near or far from ocean does.
How is it that of a hushed afternoon a man may drowse in Brooklyn with his elbow near the name Palmyra.
It may be that Nineveh is talked of by a person with his mouth somewhat full of some vegetation favored by tall, river-running-about American aborigines.
Brooklyn, dear, you rest somewhere around anonymous Assyrians and could-be-named American-born Indians.
I say you are gorgeous; your temples magnificently send their sleepily terrifying smoke to Eastern skies.
Though trolleys reach you with mothers who know hatpins, family-bibles and America of some years ago, you are no less Nineveh than Nineveh is.
I could say Nineveh is in those family-bibles had by much-weighing ladies who have curves and straight lines and curves rather far apart.
Fatness, O Brooklyn, is just as much Assyrian, just as much Eastern, of the East with chariots and wide swords.
I can imagine aged goers-about in Nineveh, drowsing, looking at something, becoming confused, and thinking of something nearer Brooklyn than Orenotep is.
Burnish, O Brooklyn, the chariots of iron that have horses go before them off to battle having much iron.
Flash, Brooklyn, with all your Eastern towers by the Sound.
Have, Brooklyn, the pains of not-daringness the way Nineveh has.
Mist, Brooklyn, comes to sin, and soils and embellishes your many-windowed,

exotic edifices.
Allar-hata-pan, great, cruel man of war, is a Brooklyn man, though not born there.
Fidget at peace, Brooklyn, and wish for times when spears go deeply into the cunning withinnesses of beings.
Eighty thousand voices, well-timed, say, greatly, Brooklyn is gorgeous.
Gorgeous and sad, O Nineveh.
Gorgeous and many, O Nineveh.
Dissolution's in thee, Brooklyn, and the ocean and streams by you run with the blood of the slain and sick.
Hours are everything.
Boom, O chariots,
And to Brooklyn go
And there prevail.

Eli Siegel

Discouraged People

The discouraged
People were wedged
So closely together in the subway
You could take one discouraged person
    for the other.

Eli Siegel

Eagles Go With The Fine News To Many Places

Curiously the wilderness
Had thousands of little beings going about in its wide, dark, cool ground, underneath the tall, uncaring trees.
It was a mad, quiet green which covered the multitudes of feeling, running smallnesses, bent on using earth and all joyously.
What way for joy has a black thing, many, many in an inch of wide, wilderness ground. Here, in great coolness, insects speed and tumble, scream and are amazed and rightly disregard the sun, which yet is around.
They have fear, they tire, they go slower than before, they rumple sections of unforbidding ferns; they are cruel to certain matters coming their way; they have certain impressions as to the use and pleasure-giving powers of light, present here below in the wilderness.
(Wilderness light is around and light lets wilderness do as it will, which makes what some very small beings have: this, wilderness light.)
Light comes from some pretty far place, and gets through, O making-its-way light, the spaces between the branches of very tall trees, and comes to the cool thresholds of forests, the deeps and beginnings of wildernesses, and there is everything and all that to tugging, circling, line-making, satisfaction bent, noisy, exulting, shrieking societies using wilderness's green inches.
Here we have victories and longings, small unutterable despairs and adequate joys.
Among the green, low lace of the wilderness an unfolding of destinies and an obedience to various divine wills, semi-divine, uncaring divine wills and some all excited and trembling.
Divine wills tremble at some sights in the low depths of wildernesses.
Divine will turned tiny and green, tiny and red, and set about scurrying unnoticed in wilderness's strange points.
Divine will got ardent and began playing life's eating and seeing game in miniature, complete fashion.
Up barks of trees impelled, live objects go and are proud to be somewhat high on trees, so they celebrate.
Celebrations are common on the wide, peopled, filled, very diverse floor of wilderness.
Fern is happy; weeds rejoice and eagles go with the fine news to many places.
And so we come to birds.

Eli Siegel

Heaven for the Landlord; or, Forthwith Understands

The landlord's Heaven is where
  There's a constant coming in of rent
  And nothing at all is spent
On any repair.

The landlord's Heaven is where
  As the Heavenly clouds roll—
  For him, rent increases roll
In, constantly; for there
Is no Heavenly rent control,
No Heavenly rent control—
Nothing to question the landlord's soul,
Nothing to question the landlord's soul.

What landlord ever to heaven went
Without a hope of collecting rent?—
Where the Heavenly clouds roll,
Where the rent increases roll
  Into the landlord's hands
  By the Great Landlord's clear commands—
  Which every tenant understands:
  Forthwith.

Eli Siegel

Hot Afternoons Have Been In Montana

Quiet and green was the grass of the field,
The sky was whole in brightness,
And O, a bird was flying, high, there in the sky,
So gently, so carelessly and fairly.
Here, once, Indians shouted in battle,
And moaned after it.
Here were cries, yells, night, and the moon over these men,
And the men making the cries and yells; it was
Hundreds of years ago, when monks were in Europe,
Monks in cool, black monasteries, thinking of God, studying Virgil;
Monks were in Europe, a land having an ocean, miles of water, between
It and this land, America, possessing Montana.
(New York, Vermont, New Mexico, America has too.)
Indians, Indians went through Montana,
Thinking, feeling, trying pleasurably to live.
This land, shone on by the sun now, green, quiet now,
Was under their feet, this time; we live now and it is hundreds
of years after.
Montana, thou art, and I say thou art, as once monks said of God,
And thought, too: Thou art.
Thou hast Kansas on thy side;
Kansas is is in the newspapers, talked of by men;
Idaho thou hast, and far away, Singapore, Alabama, Brazil.
That bird over this green, under that sun, God, how sweet and
graceful it is!
Could we ever do that? Machines that fly are clumsy and ugly;
Birds go into the air so softly, so fairly; see its curves; Earth!
In Montana, men eat and have bodies paining them
Because they eat.
Kansas, with Montana, in America, has, too, men pained by
their eating;
So has England, with Westminster Abbey, where poets lie,
dead now;
O, what their poetry can do; what poetry can do.
There is the brain of man, a soft, puzzling, weak affair;
Lord, the perfect green of this meadow.
Look at the pure heat and light of that big sun,
And the cleanness of the sky.
Night comes, night has come.

Was not Montana here in the Middle Ages, when old Rome
was at its oldest, when
Aristotle wrote,
In Greece, Greece by the Aegean, with the Mediterranean near?
Indians killed each other here,
With the moon over them.
Indians killed each other near Cape Cod, near Boston, in
Louisiana, too.
It was before white men came from England, to see them; the
white men were seen by them.
Snows have been here, in Montana, while the Indians have been.
Girls are in Helena, mines are in Helena,
Men work in them painfully and long for the bodies of girls;
And long for much more that is in the world, in thee, Earth.
Men work, suffer, are little, ugly, too.
O, mountains are in Montana,
The Rocky Mountains are in California, Utah, Colorado, Montana.
Indians were here, too, by rivers, in these mountains, lived in
mountains.
Europe has its Paris, and men live there; Stendhal, Rabelais,
Gautier, Hume were there.
God, what is it man can do?
There are millions of men in the world, and each is one man,
Each is one man by himself, taking care of himself all the time,
and changing other men and being changed by them;
The quiet of this afternoon is strange, haunting, awful;
Hear that buzzing in the hot grass, coming from live things;
and those crows' cries from somewhere;
There is a sluggish, sad brook near here, too.
The bird is gone now, so graceful, fair as it was,
And the sky has nothing but the brightness of air in it.
The clean color of air.
The sun makes it be afternoon here;
In Paris and Sumatra, it is night;
Dark Malays are in lands by the Indian Ocean,
An ocean there is we call the Indian;
Men went to these Malays near the Indian Ocean, in the
eighteenth century, in frigates and ships-of-the-line;
And men living here are Indians, too.
O, the cry of the Indian in battle, hundreds of years ago, in woods,
in plains, in mountains;
War might have been seen once in this meadow, now in green,

now hot;
Hundreds of years ago it might have been seen, and tens of years,
and a thousand.
There was love among Indians; there is love in Paris, Moscow,
London, and New York.
Men have been in war, ever,
And men have thought, and written books, about war, love, and
mind.
Mist comes in this earth,
And there have been sad, empty, pained, longing souls going
through mist.
O, the green in mist that is to be seen in the world.
And time goes on, the world is moving, all of it, so time goes on
in this world.
It is now a hot, quiet afternoon in Montana,
Montana with the Rocky Mountains;
Virginia with the Allegany Mountains:
(Indians ambushed Braddock in the Allegany Mountains; the
woods, once quiet, once dark,
Sounded sharply and deeply with cries, moans, and shots;
Washington was there;
Washington Irving wrote of Washington, so did Frenchmen
who knew Voltaire;
In 1755, Braddock was ambushed and died, and then, in Paris
men and women wrote of philosophy who were elegant,
witty and thought spirit was of matter; say Diderot,
Helvetius, and Madame du Deffand; Samuel Johnson was
in London then; Pitt was in England; men lived in Montana,
Honolulu, Argentina and near the Cape of Good Hope;
O, life of man, O, Earth; Earth, again and again!)
And there have been hot afternoons, all through time, history,
as men say;
Hot afternoons have been in Montana.
There have been hot afternoons, and quiet, soft, lovely twilights;
Gray, Collins, Milton wrote of these;
There have been hot afternoons in quiet English churchyards,
and hot afternoons in America, in Montana; and green
everywhere and bright sky; there are deserts in Africa,
America, and Australia;
Clear air is healthful; men go to Colorado, near Wyoming,
near Montana in the mountains, sick men go to the
mountains where Indians once lived, fought and killed

each other.
O, the love of bodies, O, the pains of bodies on hot, quiet
afternoons, everywhere in the world.
Men work in factories on hot afternoons, now in Montana,
and now in New Hampshire; walk the streets of Boston
on hot afternoons;
Novels stupid and forgot, have been written in afternoons;
Matinées of witty comedies in London and New York are in
afternoons;
Indians roamed here, in this green field, on quiet, hot afternoons,
in years now followed by hundreds of years.
Hot afternoons are real; afternoons are; places, things, thoughts,
feelings are; poetry is;
The world is waiting to be known; Earth, what it has in it!
The past is in it;
All words, feelings, movements, words, bodies, clothes, girls,
trees, stones, things of beauty, books, desires are in it;
and all are to be known;
Afternoons have to do with the whole world;
And the beauty of mind, feeling knowingly the world!
The world of girls' beautiful faces, bodies and clothes, quiet
afternoons, graceful birds, great words, tearful music,
mind-joying poetry, beautiful livings, loved things, known
things: a to-be-used and known and pleasure-to-be giving
world.

Eli Siegel

Hymn to Fourth Avenue

Ah, all the books waiting for you
In the crowded bookshops of Fourth Avenue.
Experiences galore;
Experiences you'll adore.
Bibliographical thrills
New as the hills.
Mental fountains,
Emotional mountains.

II

In books, you'll find what you are looking for.
In books is that which makes existence more.
Our hopes in life are often in an old book store.

III

A book in Schulte's perhaps can explain
A puzzling thing. A book to lessen pain
Is now in Weiser's, rich in mental gain.

IV

Surprise is waiting on the Biblo shelves.
Green Book Store volumes tell about ourselves,
And bring us news: the word that shines and delves.

V

The same is true of all the other shops.
Our lives are there in all their skips and stops,
In all their valleys, all their mountain-tops.

VI

Come, then, and see what's in Fourth Avenue .
Ah, all the wealth that's old and all that's new!—
And what a page, a book, can do and do.

Hymn To Jazz And The Like

What is sound, as standing for the world and the mind of man at any time, and in any situation?
Sound is an unknown, immeasurable reservoir which has been gone into and used to have chants, rituals, jigs, bourrées, sonatas, symphonies, songs, concertos: all of these show themselves, proudly saying, I am sound, I am music.
Sound took a new form in America or somewhere, Oh, say, around 1900.
There had been Go Down, Moses, which did new, clattering, ominous, delightful, religious, thundering, kind things with sound.
There had been Never Said a Mumblin' Word, which did things with sound different from what occurred in Don Giovanni, Xerxes, or The Bohemian Girl—you know, The Bohemian Girl of Balfe.
Sound is looking for new illustrations showing the might, glory, findingness, and abandon of man.
Yah, and Oh, Lord, there was the St. Louis Blues.
Sounds were made to fall into different places in this.
Notes behaved otherwise.
Something in you expected a note here, and it was there.
Something in you expected a note to be this way and it was that.
Ha, what Jazz does to the this and that of notes, the isness and wasness and might-be-ness of chords.
Frankie and Johnnie was notes doing different things in America, being in front of each other and in back of each other differently,
Being large and small differently.
Ah, what a blessing in rowdy divinity Casey Jones is!
She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain helped to have notes show more of what they could do.
And there was Alexander's Ragtime Band.
(Berlin, Irving first name, was proximate to the right wildness then.)
And Venus Anadyomene, the Beale Street Blues, with its going down and up and around,
And its sassy tragedy.
And let's mention Memphis Blues.
East St. Louis Toodle-O, go into dark, make advanced noise there, moan with grandeur, and come out right.
The Mooche, you come like a procession of right people at twilight saying, This is right, not that; and you walk against walls and the walls run.

In the Mood, Glenn Miller or no, you show what repetition can do
and surprise like the surprise in Beethoven's Emperor Concerto
as it changes from a hush and faintness to crash.
In the Mood, you are acclaimed.
Fletcher Henderson, when you brought scholarship to the new
joyous earth-turning in America, you did something for Jazz
and destiny's certificate.
The Music Goes Round and Round—whatever you come from,
you do something for reality as center and circumstance, sober
whirling, valve majesty, surprise and the heaven of brashness.
Jazz, you have faltered, but it was you who faltered, and there was
you.
Jazz, you show that symmetry and unsymmetry, order and
casualness are alike.
The Beatles have used you somewhat to show that the whisper
of one person can shout across land and water.
Rock and Roll, you say something of geology and man's uncertainty.
Jazz, you are amiable about Chopin's Revolutionary Etude.
Jazz, when Mozart was most vocally bold in the Don Giovanni,
you were looking on years ago, ready to be encouraged
honorably.
Jazz, you were around when the Gregorian Chant was doing things
to man somewhat after Charlemagne and after the changing of
France to a kingdom.
Jazz, you have in you Homer, Marlowe, Coleridge, Kipling,
Swinburne, Hopkins, Rimbaud, also the person who wrote
Sir Patrick Spens.
(I am not being careless.)
Jazz, you deserve another hymn.

Eli Siegel

Local Stop, Sheridan Square

I
The subways, as usual, take emotions north and south.
When you are in a subway, emotion goes with you.
Emotion for thousands has come to a stop at Christopher Street, which is another name for Sheridan Square—
And the General who rode so greatly,
Is waiting for you in a new form.
There is a little park to the left
That has had emotion enough in it to give new life to Greenland.
But when you come south on the subway and emerge
From rumbling and dark and steps and platform,
The first thing you see is space—
Blessed, hopeful space, in a city as large as any.
Streets converge—Barrow, Grove, Seventh Avenue, Christopher,
But there is space
And that means there is possibility: for space, somewhere, as a philosopher might see it, is the same as possibility.

II
When people got out of the Local Stop at Sheridan Square,
There was possibility in the emotion they had.
It was a world seen anew, maybe, or a girl seen as more friendly.
People have come south, all these years, on the Seventh Avenue subway,
With possibility as another name for themselves;
And possibility is never wholly unfaithful,
For is it not always possibility?

III
Sheridan Square with its converging streets and space
Is the headquarters of possibility in this land.
It has been that for many persons
Now with homes, resources and thoughts elsewhere than at a local stop in Greenwich Village.
The local stop is remembered in towns, colleges, farms, banks, libraries, churches, synagogues, rooms:
In the United States as just the United States.

IV
Up those steps at a local stop

People went and there was a new pat in their hearts,
A new looking-for-something in their lives,
And, with all the indications saying otherwise,
That looking-for has not been wholly deceived or disappointed.

V
The space and the streets at this local stop, Sheridan Square, are too much like reality itself to play ignoble tricks.
After all, a subway stop in New York City is as much of things as a wooded place in Saskatchewan,
Or a level hot area in New Mexico.
And the people who have been within this space and on these streets
Could not lessen its factness as immeasurable in possibility.

VI
Once when you got out of the station, the local stop, of this Sheridan Square where streets come together and space says Hello,
There was Hubert's Cafeteria in front of you, if you were looking just that way.
Those who once of an evening, of late night—of an afternoon, too,
Were there
Are now in the life of America, in all its regions, divisions, localities, districts—in all America.
Some of the Hubert's visitors and lingerers are dead.
(The dead had expectations.)
Hubert's Cafeteria sounds funny, rather low,
But emotion was there,
And spread out wherever spreading could be—
Some of it is now on a ship half-way across the Atlantic—
Some of it is now on a plane three-quarters across the Atlantic.

VII
Births, marriages, deaths have found Sheridan Square indispensable.
And this afternoon—fairly late—many people coming from the north will get out here.
They live nearby.
They came from the north once, when they did not live nearby.
They now do.
Living nearby in this world, to this world, can be right.
For seeing the world nearby:
Sheridan Square is a mobile, feverish, historical, everlasting, real and real place to begin with.
It is a local stop.

Eli Siegel

Love Lurches Along

I

In love, you don't know what you're getting in Elizabeth, N.J.,
And you don't know what you're getting in Pottstown, Pa.
So why should New York be different?
Since when was New York heavensent?

II

See you tomorrow, if I can make it, dear.
So you don't want to see me; I could have known it long ago.
Not tonight, Elmer, I just don't feel like it.
You won't get the children if I can help it.
Good night.
You see, I got a boy friend.
What's happening to us?
Don't you think you should see somebody about it?
You're breaking my arm.
What is that stuff you're wearing, Grace, it's something.

III

Love goes on merrily,
Goes on wearily.
Sixth Avenue had an L,
Now it hasn't.
Edith had James,
Now she hasn't.

IV

Valises, Kinsey Reports, grass.
Central Park, Prospect Park, calls.
Visits, embraces, and stalls.
Oh, what's the matter? alas!
John O'Hara and the blue sky,—
There still must be a reason why.

V

Mystery goes on in Pottstown, Pa.
The same goes on in Elizabeth, N.J.
New York is a little more recherché,
But mystery's there in the same damn way.

Eli Siegel

Milwaukee Eagle

O Milwaukee eagle, circler over muddy rivers,
Who takes the sun contentedly and air approvingly;
Who never has alighted on languidly carried parasols had by tall ladies in brown;
Who has seen sheet-iron all the while preferring clouds—
You can be the life's-soothing of Miss Halloran, of John Doonane.
Cross long tracks, clean in your sun, eagle, and wheel over 400 rosebushes, many, many white.
You take your sky-nearing head to cities possessing the tired at 9 and the moody at 11.
You possessed the moment's notice of the much and dimly in love Al Hamber, who also is around a machine which has written the number 14, and the number 4.
Something like a rhombus is made by your busy this way, that way wings, in the gently embracing sky, having you.
You are not a civic problem to Milwaukee. You do not irk Milwaukee householders, given to dozing when the sun is red.
You do not question time and what air is and space is is not matter of annoyance to you. Milwaukee eagle, impoliteness is not for you, not in you, any way at all.
Take your mornings blithely, much flying one.
Be worthy of the sun, you, at home where all is high.
Disregard all two-legged, no-winged sojourners.
Traverse the sluggish creek, the buoyant brook, the unconcerned river.
Be unaware of any star but in that manner you choose. Take dark gracefully, light becomingly.
Adorn mist and add to the power of rain.
Beyond snow, be gravely still and pleased.
Take Milwaukee as you please.
You have your rights, eagle, and your mad privileges, your not to be ever taken away bird and being madnesses.
Skirt against light and charge white air, reposing clouds; do this, and, eagle, the world is pleased and says, Go on.
You go over Milwaukee, but Milwaukee is your debtor.
Be seen when you may.
See hats 2000 feet down.
Sleep in clouds.
Be over Milwaukee.
Get into dreams.
Milwaukee eagle, be mad and rest; be seen and untroubled; surround houses and be the despair of gentlemen, the favorite of air, the pampered of earth, and

the swift decoration of Milwaukee and furious, strange, unthought of, wide heights, yours, O eagle.

Eli Siegel

New York Is Of, in More Than One Way

New York is of in four ways:
It is the New York of 1622, with the Indians around, and its shape then:
    which it still has.
It is the New York of Peter Stuyvesant.
It is the New York of James J. Walker.
It is the New York of someone who came here from New Jersey this morning and left this afternoon.

Eli Siegel

Ocean, Mr., Mrs. Blink

Noise near beaches,
'Mid July.
Scampering of thousands of humans who work in factories and stores; and homes.
Ocean near the scampering citizens and citizenesses.
Citizens go to ocean;
Citizenesses scream coyly.
Hey, ocean, how far you go.
Mr. Blink is on a big wave.
The fat legs of Mrs. Blink are pretty beneath the green, heavy ocean waves; such a place for Mrs. Blink's fat, old legs.
Brooklyn near, hot Sunday afternoon with trolley-cars going all around and all around; in hot dust, hot dust, going up to Brooklyn's hot sky, July, hot sky.
Mr. Blink is on a big, new wave.
Mrs. Blink is getting cold.
She is on the beach now.
Mrs. Blink, mother of three, is walking on the beach now.
Mrs. Blink is not so graceful.
Mrs. Blink's first is called Irving .
Mrs. Blink thinks of late supper.
Mr. Blink is enjoying a big, new wave, near Brooklyn.
Mr. Blink and Mrs. Blink are different.
So are two waves.
Mrs. Blink is a thinking lady.
She thinks all the time.
Her second is called Arthur.
Her third is called Ethel.
Such experience has had Mrs. Blink, housewife of Brooklyn, wife of a dry-goods man of Brooklyn.
Mrs. Blink doesn't know her Arthur is going to die soon.
Mrs. Blink doesn't know everything.
Look at the fat legs of Mrs. Blink in the sun.
Look at the hair on Mrs. Blink's fat legs, hair on Mrs. Blink's fat legs in the sun.
Mrs. Blink loves her Irving.
Irving will be a lawyer.
Irving is now at a party.
He likes Irma.

Those waves; that ocean.
That ocean, that ocean.
Mrs. Blink's ocean.
Mrs. Blink and Mr. Blink are by and in the great big, blue,
green ocean, near Brooklyn .

Eli Siegel

One Question

I —
Why?

Eli Siegel

Put Zebras By The Mississippi

Swiftly in forests, the zebra,
Slowly the Mississippi;
Zebras are by the Mississippi,
Not so by, but by.
Where the palm-tree waves slowly in heat, with many-colored,
little live things all about, green, orange, pink, black,
purple, red and all,
O, do say, the Mississippi flows slowly.
Hell, is not the same moon over zebras and the Mississippi?
Put zebras by the Mississippi.
Put ichneumons by the Mississippi.
Put the Mississippi anywhere.
Put zebras where you like.
Put palm-trees in New York state.
The moon's over all.
The moon's not so big.
Zebras are by the Mississippi.
Purple's by the Mississippi.
Palm-trees are.
Anywhere's anywhere, anywhere's everywhere.
Anything's everywhere.
Put zebras by the Mississippi; O, do.
O, do.

Eli Siegel

Quiet, Tears, Babies

Quiet in the street,
In the street with houses having babies,
Lately born, lately born.
These babies now are growing,
And the street is quiet now,
At half past six in the afternoon.
Quiet is the street, quiet is the street;
But now, later, a growing baby is crying.
O crying soul, hardly heard,
For you cry not so loud,
O growing, crying baby,
In the quiet, quiet street,
With men, with women, quietly slowly passing,
Who were babies once, who cried once, and who now make men and women and babies cry, and who cry, and who cry now, O but they do.
Quiet street, crying babies,
Sun slowly going down,
Men and women quietly going up and down the quiet street;
Tears, God dear, tears.

Eli Siegel

Ralph Isham,1753 And Later

Know you him, O, him,
Who lived in those days?
He wore a gay coat,
And he stepped along, jauntily, jauntily,
The streets of London town;
In 1753.
Where he is buried, who knows?
Who was his father, who knows?
Who are his children, who knows?
But, oh! on sunny mornings
How gayly he tripped along
The bright streets of London.
A trim cane he had,
And he gracefully took snuff from a very neat snuff-box.
My, but he was courtly.
He saluted walking, smiling, pretty ladies,
And they curtsied sweetly before him.
He was a gay man.
He read his Addison and he read his Pope;
He quoted his Thomson and he quoted his Young.
Lord, how he stood up for Virgil and the classics!
He had heard of Sam Johnson;
'Rough and learned fellow, Johnson, ' said he.
God, God, quietly, quietly now he lies somewhere, in some
churchyard, in sunny mornings, lies in quiet nights,
terrifyingly still.
He jested in the taverns, and was well applauded.
Oh, but he could quote his Horace.
Many was the play he was finely witty about.
He was pained in death, died slowly;
The morning he died was rainy; later the sun came, and the
afternoon was lovely; people said, many, many of them in
London: 'How lovely this afternoon is.'
He lies now in some churchyard of England.
Somewhere there are copies of Pope with his name in them
and a few marks of his.
And where is his snuff, and his snuff-box, and his cane, and his
smile, and his bow?
Where are the sunny mornings he was gay in, and jauntily

walked in?
Ralph Isham, —well, now, are not many, many greater than he
dead, and as quiet as can be?
What was he to himself?
There, there is something.
And the ladies, who curtsied to him on sunny mornings, in what
churchyards are they?
Where are their laces, their brocades, their ribbons, their figures
and their smiles; and oh, yes, their beauty?
God, how many things die.
Ralph Isham was slim, rather wicked, married rather happily.
His wife died early, and where is she?
Ralph Isham read Seneca, and Epicurus, and Plato, and had read
many philosophers and many poets on death.
Who knows that Ralph Isham is dead?
There was Ralph Isham, there was London, there were ladies,
there were authors, some in books of English literature,
studied by dapper youths in colleges in the Middle West
of these States.
Pope is studied in Kansas;
Thomson is studied in Kansas;
The name of Young is heard in Topeka;
And the name of Ralph Isham, who loved Pope, who loved
Thomson, who knew Young, is not heard in Topeka.
Ralph Isham came along with his cane, came down the street,
with trees on both sides of the street.
He was feeling well then; he meant to go to the play that afternoon;
he had bought a copy of Dryden that morning.
So here he is with his cane, coming gayly down the street.
And the churchyard he's in, what is the name of that churchyard?
Churchyards are lovable; so, too, is Ralph Isham lovable across the years;
Though, now, he had lain with chambermaids, and barmaids,
and servant girls, whom he had seen as sprightly, pretty,
likable young misses.
These young misses have no regrets now, anyway.
And Ralph Isham had no wish to be cruel.
He knew his Lucretius, and knew the teaching that matter
it is which man is made of, and matter dies and dies.
Ralph Isham has been seen as dead.
On sunny mornings, millions of people have walked the streets of London,
and have not thought of him at all;
And on dark, rainy nights, millions of people walking streets,

have thought of many things, but not at all of Ralph Isham.
And what is Ralph Isham now?
Oh, what, oh, what is he?
What is Ralph Isham, gay Londoner, who 1ived in 1753?
What, what is he?

Eli Siegel

Shakespeare, Compactly

Shakespeare, Compactly

Look at Hamlet
What Hamlet’s father said to him,
In Hamlet’s mind grew rather dim.
The lesson is: We can’t obey
Unless our mind is just one way.

Self-reproof Isn’t Everything
The prince soliloquizes;
His indignation rises.
And Hamlet stands reproved.
But Hamlet hasn’t moved.

All about Lady Macbeth
Lady Macbeth, too ambitious,
Caused her husband to be vicious.
Macbeth heeding her commands,
Made his lady wash her hands.

Family Net
Romeo and Juliet
Is about a family net.
Love fares sadly by a vault.
Wasn’t it the families’ fault?

The Question in King Lear
All through the play this is asked by King Lear:
Could anyone tell me what is going on here?

Eli Siegel

Somewhere This

Trees standing in rain;
Footfalls on the pavement, feet crushing leaves;
A little girl leaving her house;
The moon, barely to be seen, shining dully in the gray sky;
A cry from somewhere;
A man scolding his wife, and being heard outside;
A man going into a library;
A shout from somewhere.
'Chicken I want,' says someone near.
'O, what do I care,' says a girl.
'He loves me, I'm sure,' says a girl.
'What the hell do I care,' says a boy.
'What did he do then?' says a man.
The elevated comes roaring by.
Rain falls quietly.
It is cold.
It grows darker.
In the library nearby are books of history.
'My, my, what shall I do?' asks a girl.
'That's what he died of,' says a young man.
'He was in the war,' says a girl.
'She's the prettiest girl I know,' says someone.
The elevated can now be hardly heard; it is roaring elsewhere.
Water falls from the trees.
'O, what do I care,' says a girl.
'I love her,' says a boy of a girl.
'Whoo, that's rich,' says a young man.
A good dirty story is being told.
A man worries about the money he has.
The elevated comes roaring by somewhere else.
'O, hell, no!' says someone.
The moon now can hardly be seen.
'I like poetry,' says a girl near the library.
'O, what do you care?' says a girl to a girl.
'It's such a long time,' says a girl.
An elevated goes roaring by.
'O, my, my, what shall I do?' says someone.
The elevated goes roaring by elsewhere.
'Isn't he crazy?' says a girl, giggling.

'Who in hell cares?' says a young man.
'No, I didn't see the newspaper this morning,' says someone.
'He better had pay me,' says someone.
'Who put out the lights?' asks a man.
A boy and a girl are together.
What is that girl thinking of?
What are the meals in that house, with the lights on in the first and fourth floors?
Lights come up in the second floor, too.
The lights in the second floor of another house are out.
Men and women, boys and girls, are on the streets and in houses.
It is later now; it is after seven.
It is raining very thinly.
It is cold.
The elevated goes roaring by and it is later still.
The moon can hardly be seen.
It is later,
O, it is later.

Eli Siegel

Sunlight in Slush, in Puddles, and in Wet Municipal Surfaces; or, Miracle on Eighth Avenue below Fourteenth Street

I

It was a dying sun, too.
The sun did not have the energy it had two hours ago, nor in some
days last June,
But it was the same sun, with the same distances.
—Was it the sun in black water
On an Eighth Avenue pavement?
What else could it be?
The sun was allotting itself to ever so many dark, watery surfaces;
I guess, being the sun, it could do nothing else.
But it was a miracle, a miracle being that you can look at, with amazement
inhabiting what you look with.
Certainly, it was before, but there was something like amazement
when the sun (they say it is millions of miles away) was,
through its light, in the consequences of a February rainfall
and snowfall at once, with warmth present.
The sun was in February slush.
If this is not something to be amazed at,
Let us consult the most incredible lives of saints,
Written carelessly,
And call ourselves not careful.

II

The sunlight was like a true saint, a factual saint,
As it took up residence in slush.
The sunlight was like a beneficent mediaeval visitation
As it took up discernible residence in a puddle.
One puddle, along with the sun, had clouds in it
As plain as anything:
Grey, rotund, white vagueness within a puddle of water.

III

It is necessary to say what sunlight in slush bodes.

Offhand, it seems hard to think it bodes anything but well.
Slush (undesirable) is visited with power by February sunlight (desirable)
And the slush has it that way, by the nature of slushness.

IV

Slush is of various kinds,
Puddles are of various kinds.
Black wet areas on pavements
Are of various kinds:
But the February sunlight was present in all the kinds that came to be on Eighth Avenue below Fourteenth Street the day I'm speaking of.
The sunlight was present, even, in a furrow a car had made.
Sunlight gets into vehicular furrows and can be recorded as being in furrows.

V

The hardware store looked on.
Pizza selling went on near the visitation of slush by sunlight, and dwelling therein.
Sanctity can come to pizzas
As you think of sunlight—fading but there—in slush, some of it with long oblong furrows.

VI

While sunlight—dying sunlight—
Can come to slush,
We can't be sure
What can visit us,
What can occur to us;
What we are in a world of light without end
And possible slush ready to show itself, too—
In a world where both light and slush are indefatigable, and, are often friendly in February.

Eli Siegel

The Dark That Was Is Here

A girl, in ancient Greece,
Be sure, had no more peace
Than one in Idaho.
To feel and yet to know
Was hard in Athens, too.
I'm sure confusion grew
In Nika's mind as she,
While wanting to be free,
Hoped deeply to adore
Someone; and so no more
Be wretched and alone.
— Ah, hear the keen, wise moan
Of wind at twilight past
Old trees, which darken fast.
That wind was heard, that blur
Of trees was seen by her
Of Attica.— The sound
Of wind on dry, cool ground
Once more is heard by girl,
With heart in autumn whirl.
The trees stand up in grey;
It is their ancient way—
All this in Idaho,
Where grieving girls now go
In mingled love and fear.
The dark that was is here.

Eli Siegel

'Tis Loveliess, Sir

When Sue Collins was a-courted a hundred years ago and more,
She was glad she was loved and she said,Yes, when Jim asked
her, Will you marry me?
The children of her children now live in New York, and one said
lately, I don't like New York but I keep my business here;
And one votes the straight Republican ticket year after year.

Eli Siegel

Twenty-One Distichs About Children

Twenty-one Distichs about Children

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity.—WORDSWORTH

1. Bernice thinks a little.
Bernice is two months old; the world is new for her.
Ah, will her parents' angry world quite do for her?

2. Efficacious mother.
A child has clenched his fist; there's anger in his eye;
An efficacious mother finds out the reason why.

3. Janet is puzzled and not gratified.
Janet was near when Grandma Jane talked sharp to Mother Kate.
The little girl must be mixed up with all this love and hate.

4. Children don't want mothers to be far from them.
Children want their mothers to
Like the things that children do.

5. Weak mothers don't impress children.
When mothers cry and make a fuss,
Keen children think: They're bad for us.

6. Quarrelsome parents are just too much.
When husbands do not like their wives,
Disorderly are children's lives.

7. Children are not to be summed up.
A child may have a dirty face,
Who yet has thought of space—and space.

8. Mothers should not see their children's friends as rivals.
Wise Mary sees her children's friends
As perhaps having Mary's ends.

9. Resumption of previous subject.
When children see their parents quarrel,

They're very low in life's dark barrel.

10. Magnificence in Jackie.
A child has come—we know not whence—
In Jackie, there's magnificence.

11. The way a child is made.
Reality, so busy—look, has made
A child, like landscape: light and shade.

12. Mothers can meditate on fingers.
On an infant's little finger,
A mother's mind can linger, linger.

13. Time, by itself, does not make for knowledge.
The years may go, and parents may be far
From knowing, clearly, who their children are.

14. Alexander has failed.
He was a man of means; his name was Alexander;
His little Helen asked in vain; he failed to understand her.

15. Pomp discernible.
When children dash and children romp,
The world of motion shows its pomp.

16. Fine responsibility.
All parents have a fine responsibility:
To mingle for their children, truth and glee.

17. Fact unknown to aunt.
A boy has often clenched his fist,
As he some sour aunt has kissed.

18. Dreary catastrophe.
As much as little Alice was unknown,
She thought, I'm in myself and just my own.

19. Exclamation.
Oh, what an ethical mishap! —
A mental, ill-timed, peevish slap.

20. Shakespeare called on.
See Hamlet, and Miranda, too,
In three-day Edward, now so new.

21. What all children want.
A child will like it, when his parents chide
With depth and beauty; and with pride.

Eli Siegel