

## Butler Literary Contest Section

*The following short stories, essay and group of poems were the winning material in the 1947 Butler literary contest. Frances King's poems won first prize in the poetry division; Mary Alice Kessler's "Old Man" and "Dr. Maudseth" were awarded first prize in the short story section; and Robert Bowles' "The Dilemma of Faith" placed first in the essay division.*

### To The Critic

FRANCES KING

So you want to see me?  
You want to scrape off the dust?  
You think I'm worth looking for?  
Okay, mister.  
Walk out into the garden some morning  
And look around.  
It will have rained the night before.  
The tears will tremble on the tangle  
Of words at your feet.  
Slowly, up through the dark,  
Sinewy branches of words and phrases  
I'll come. I'll crawl on my knees,  
Up through the labyrinth and out.  
You say I'm not a butterfly?  
You say butterflies can't come out of those places?  
Sure, I'm a butterfly, mister.  
I'm the lemon butterfly with latent possibilities  
That stands poised on your shoe tip.  
My thoughts like my movements  
Shift backward and forward—  
No decisions please, no problems.  
If my adjectives prove too brilliant for your dusty eyes,  
And my nouns bind your ankles too forcefully,  
Or you accidentally trip over some stray adverbs,  
Why, I'll just crawl back into the labyrinth  
And dig and burrow and hide my wings.

## TO THE ACTORS

How do you know it's not tonight?  
How do you know the show won't close  
Without warning on your pat faces?  
Will you be able to adjust your makeup  
To an agreeably comic mask?  
When the props begin to blur and shake  
And the trees take to walking,  
Will you be able to shout down  
The scene-stealers?  
Your lines,  
Will you be witty enough,  
Letting them know you really  
Were expecting it anytime?  
What will you do when the roses  
Wither in your arms, dust,  
And you know the angel refused  
To back the show any longer  
In view of the receipts?  
Eh, what then?  
Comedy, manners, problem play?  
Tragedy, tragedy, tragedy?

## OF WONDROUS THINGS

Of wondrous things I wish to tell,  
Of lesser things, not lavishly endowed  
With earthly wealth or written word.  
The trusting that there is a shape,  
A flower more daringly displayed  
Than western hands have courage to conceal  
More scarlet than our brush can wield.  
The hoping for a miracle of love  
Amidst the sparsely, lightened eyes  
Which, though so screened and mist-hung now,  
Have power to secretly illuminate.  
The knowing that there is a blue  
Among the thousand grayspun clouds,  
Which, though not visible to straightward eye  
Is present still in atmospheric mind.

## GRANNY LOU

Granny Lou was the first old lady  
We ever knew,  
And so Old Age for us was a room  
Around a tall, thin woman  
In a chipped black rocker.  
We children never questioned her  
About a life outside of her two rooms—  
Almost as if, though we were all so young,  
We knew there was no past or future.  
When she got tired of one room,  
She'd walk over to the other one  
And sit for a week or two.  
We didn't take the time to wonder  
If she deserved any more  
Than a backyard choked with weeds,  
And a pile of month-old papers.  
We were nearly twelve  
When we noticed a change  
In the old lady.  
A certain furtiveness appeared,  
An almost hidden joy  
That manifested itself to us  
In the form of extra cookies,  
And when I was sixteen  
And came home from my first dance,  
They said that Old Age had died.  
Three nieces came and pawed over  
Her three dresses and a coral necklace.  
And way down in the bottom drawer  
They found a notebook.  
They published all her poems,  
And the neighbors talked a lot  
And speculated on her Real Self.  
For it seemed that she  
Had used the strangest words  
Like *crystal* and *poinsettas*  
And *Tahitian wall prints*.  
And the words lived for her  
And did all the things  
Which she had never done.  
They were born, breathed, fell in love,  
Married, begot children, and  
Resembled her only in the end  
By taking a long time to die,