

TRINACRIA

Poems, Translations, Essays, Reviews



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TRINACRIA

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ANIMADVERSIONS FOR A SECOND ISSUE

Well, here we go again. Although tardy on paper—this Fall 2009 issue is being mailed out in 2010—TRINACRIA is now in its groove and will appear at regular intervals. The first issue established the template for our magazine, which means that a great deal of the preliminary scut-work is done. Minor improvements will be made, of course, but the journal's DNA is established.

TRINACRIA remains an invitation-only publication. This policy has its disadvantages, but they are outweighed by one single boon: the editor will not be inundated with reams of mediocre or wretched verse emanating like swamp gas from the workshops and discussion groups. Does this mean that I might miss out on some “mute, inglorious Milton” ensconced in overfly country? Maybe so. But I can live with it.

When William Carlson and I ran *Iambs & Trochees*, Bill's little apartment-house mailbox in Bensonhurst was daily crammed with submissions. And a great deal of the time that I spent over at Bill's was dedicated to wading through this dreck. It was maddening. I tried to convince Carlson to make *Iambs & Trochees* a restricted journal, but he refused. He clung to the naïve belief that there is a great deal of talent out there, and that we had to tap into it. Four years of garbage in his mailbox didn't shake his faith. There really isn't that much top-notch talent out there, if one judges by the standards of the Western tradition, rather than by the obligatory all-inclusiveness of multiculturalist mandates.

That doesn't mean that good poems aren't being written. And here, to underline that fact, I announce the six Pushcart Prize nominations from our inaugural issue. They are, in alphabetical order, the following authors and poems:

- Mark Allinson for his “Diagnostic,” an excellent Spenserian sonnet on the persistence of romantic impulses from youth into old age, with a final couplet of great plangency.
- Peter Austin for his “Sport,” a series of fluent fourteeners quatrains that constitute a veritable Rake's Progress in verse, with a slam-dunk closure.

- Michael R. Burch for his “Discrimination,” a mixed sonnet that employs lists to great effect in both the octet and the sestet, in order to deliver a devastating comment on our Free Verse Establishment.
- Jared Carter for his “Cairn Submerged,” a powerful villanelle that uses stone as an image of barely repressed memory awaiting resurrection.
- Sally Cook for her “Once Upon A Time,” an English sonnet that rings all the registers of the traditional fairy tale, while directing them to hopelessness and futility.
- Leo Yankevich for his “Moonshine, 1969,” a narrative Petrarchan sonnet that captures a locale, a moment, and an attitude, all perfectly fenced in at either end by an implied domestic dispute.

TRINACRIA continues to publish excellent metrical translations of foreign poetry, both modern and ancient. We also pride ourselves on our lack of middle-class decorum in regard to subject matter. It is curious that many contemporary editors talk volubly about how much they appreciate work that is “daring, innovative, cutting-edge, exciting, and provocative” (all these are code-words for modernist stodginess). But when you publish something *truly* daring and provocative, as we did in our first issue with the sexually explicit poems of Juliana Beedy and Malcolm Paige, these same editors start making Mother-Hen clucks about “bad taste” and “inappropriate material,” as if they were Salvation Army preachers.

This reaction of theirs shows you what the Poetry Establishment in America really is: a branch office for the politically correct English departments of our colleges, replete with all the uptightness, bourgeois status-worship, faux radicalism, and prissy disapproval for which academia has become the national poster boy. These editors, afflicted with a cowardice that masquerades as good taste, won’t print anything really sexy, or honestly vituperative, or outside the bandwidth of acceptable mainstream politics. Well, we do. If you have a problem with that, *futue teipsum, cum benedictione nostra*.

Joseph S. Salemi
Woodside, New York

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Du Fu

The Fine Lady

Cream of her generation, this fine lady
Lives as a stranger in an empty valley.
“Though I was born,” said she, “to noble family,
My fortune withered down to flowers and trees.
After the heartland fell to rebel armies
My brothers met their fate down on their knees.
What good was their high rank when they lay slain?
I begged and begged, but got no bones to bury.
The world disdains all those whose time has passed;
The lamp flame flickers with the wavering breeze.
My husband changed, he sent me on my way;
His new wife is as beautiful as jade.
Faithfully blossoms fold themselves at nightfall;
Mandarin ducks stay mated, never lonely.
His eyes see only how his new wife smiles;
How can he hear how this old woman weeps?
On mountain slopes the stream runs swift and clear;
Spread on the plain the water soon turns muddy.
My serving maid just sold my last white pearl;
She wove some vines to stop the roof from leaking.”

The lady picks fresh flowers (not for her hair),
And plucks some cypress leaves that she will chew.
The weather’s cold, her blue silk sleeves are thin.
At dusk she leans against a tall bamboo.

—*Translation from the Chinese by Keith Holyoak*

Keith Holyoak

Water Rights

Crossing high Nevada desert I came
To some hardscrabble town set in a waste
Where long ago a miner staked his claim.
A road to nowhere—just some trailers braced
Against the desiccating wind, gas station,
Church, post office, tyrannized by sun
Year after year. Amid that desolation
Water was almost never seen to run—
Except in one small irrigated patch
Of lawn where rows of planted willows shaded
Marble slabs, green guardians keeping watch
Above townsfolk who'd lived, and loved, then faded.
The living thirst for water, yet instead
Take greater comfort moistening their dead.

Charles Baudelaire

A Curious Man's Dream

Do you, as I, taste pleasure in your pain?
Do others think you odd, or not quite right?
I was near death and eager, felt the strain
Of nausea, then desire mixed with fright,

Then hope, then anguish; nor did I complain.
The savored torture rose to greater height
The more the fatal hourglass did drain;
And so my soul from this known world took flight.

Then I was like a child before a show,
Hating the curtain like a parent's *No!*...
Until the truth revealed itself to me:

I'd died, unawares; terrible, dawning day
Still held me. "Is there nothing more to see?
The curtain has gone up, but there's no play!"

—*Translation from the French by Helen Palma*

Charles Baudelaire

Haze and Rain

From late fall through the springtime's muddy ways,
O sleep-conducive months! I love and praise
You, for enveloping my heart and brain
In a blurred grave and shroud of misted rain.

For in the seasons when the cold wind plays,
When through the lengthy nights the wind vane brays,
My soul, better than in the rebirth's reign,
Spreads wide its raven wings on this broad plain.

Nothing's more sweet to a heart weighed down with doom,
On which the frost's been falling for some time,
O ashen time of year, queen of our clime,

Than the unchanging aspect of your gloom,
—But two by two, on a night whose moon is dead,
To rock our grief to sleep on hazard's bed.

—Translation from the French by Helen Palma

Mark Allinson

The PC Nose

The morally immaculate
Smell evil everywhere;
The stench of prejudice and hate
They smell befouls the air.

And everywhere they stick their nose
They catch a nasty pong
Of offensiveness they must oppose
And tell you why it's wrong.

They can detect a racist slur
Or sexist attitude
With just a sniff and they concur
Our culture's crass and crude.

They're always right, they're oh so pure,
So certain and aware—
Like whited sepulchres they're sure
The stench they smell's out there.

Alfred Dorn

A Merry Widow

A herring bent on marrying a whale
Swam seven seas to hook her hunk of male.
But all the raptures of their honeymoon
Were ended by a neatly aimed harpoon.

The widow floundered back, sad-faced and tired.
“Where’s hubby now?” a lusty seal inquired,
Ogling her charms. She smiled and stroked his flipper.
“How should I know? Am I my blubber’s kipper?”

Jennifer Reeser

Morning on the Mississippi Delta

The courtyard pigeons' claws
pad past across mossed brick,
their mottled bodies thick
with mystic fruit. They pause
and stare at us, as though
awaiting from our hands
caresses, or the strands
of sweet banana dough.

With pride—or something like—
beside the wrens they strut,
now fast, now slow, and jut
their chests at nothing, strike
at palms with ruby beaks.

Sub-tropic sunlight streaks
the patio, clay urns
and terra cotta pots
made warm, as shadow dots
the Resurrection Ferns.

The air no longer heavy,
our French cathedral chimes
with faith and hope ten times
its notes across the levee.

Sally Cook

Reconstituted

Take all the pills you want to take
To lose weight, clear your skin and eyes—
Ingest them all for beauty's sake
Or health. You'll lose that extra size.

Don't worry about side effects
If pills cross over. Don't despair
When first your liver, then your sex
Go south, and in strange places hair

Appears. But what's the cost if you
Gain brighter sight and clearer pores?
You only need one kidney, and
You'll lose your allergy to spores.

Don't be old-fashioned; soon we'll view
A new and wholly ersatz you.

Frederick Turner

Let Be

Weeding, I disturb a bee
That is bumbling in the sages,
But she has forgiven me,
Goes off to the saxifrages.

There I will just let her be,
And, since bee-ing is her being,
She will go on being free,
She-ing while I go on me-ing.

“Let it be” was how the king
In that strange old myth or story
Gave the bee its sweet and sting,
Set the heavens in their glory:

Was it permit or command?
Do we own, or was he letting?
Are we in or out of hand?
Was he making or just betting?

So he gave himself away,
Changed from he-ing into she-ing,
Where his “shall” became her “may”,
Time born out of unforeseeing.

If I weed around the sage,
Letting it achieve its flower,
Do I make a kind of cage?
Do I claim a godlike power?

But the weeds are weeding me,
Cells that are, in acting, dying;
Sage-flowers fertilize the bee,
Every selling is a buying.

So creation is a cross,
“Let” and “be” in intersection,
Where the gain is in the loss,
And the death’s the resurrection.

X.J. Kennedy

Martial Arts

What paragraphs of praise gush forth from *Verb!*
Every bad poet asks him for a blurb.
For any crud he'll pour a word-libation.
It is his one best shot at publication.

The road to publication leads to bed.
To get your work accepted, girls, give head.

Just babble nonsense and by Fame be kissed!
The mills of criticism must have grist.

Free verse, to hold its readers, has to shock.
It is best jotted down with rigid cock
Or swollen clit, and use, however dumb,
Any old steamy images that come.

A poet's damned as doubleplus ungood
If anything he writes be understood.

Walther von der Vogelweide

The Maiden and the Knight

Under the linden tree in the heather
is where our double bed was.
You can find there gathered together
wonderful flowers on the grass.
By the forest in a dale,
tandaradei
sweetly sang the nightingale.

I went walking to the glade,
already my true-love was there before.
The way he met me, Holy Lady!
will be a glory forever more.
Did he kiss me? A thousand times I'm sure.
tandaradei
See how blushed my lips are?

Out there he'd spread a bedstead,
very royal, made of flowers.
If anyone goes along that path,
he'll surely know a heartfelt laugh.
By the roses you may
tandaradei
notice where my head lay.

If anyone heard he lay with me,
(God forbid!) I'd want to die.
How he cherished me, no one, never,
ever will know that, but he and I,
and one little bird,
tandaradei
 who won't say a word.

—*Translation from the German by Allen Tice*

Daniel Fernandez

A Perfect Afternoon

How could there be a better afternoon?
The art show with your tulips in a frame
Near the best works culled coast to coast: A boon
Advancing recognition of your name.
Then our long stroll beside the rolling sea
Under cloudy skies with peekaboo light
Like ponds where goldfish bob up randomly,
As seagulls caught your bread midair in flight.
At last in your boudoir we came to rest
And breast to breast rolled heavenward and sighed,
Panting as if we climbed up Everest
Then like Elizabethan lovers died.
At last a feast—and hippos on TV—
Those blessed hours ticked toward eternity.

T. S. Kerrigan

Inherent Strengths

*Explaining to French and Italian students the virtues of the
American political system of appointing public officials.*

To get your new appointment through,
You cross the palms of so and so,
A model of simplicity.
How much and who you pay it to
Is all you really need to know.

You French, like Blaise Pascal, suppose
Events for which men live or die
Are products of caprice or chance,
And based upon or measured by
The stretch of Cleopatra's nose.

Our scheme transcends a former day,
When offices, regalia,
As Edward Gibbon once maintained,
Were filled in an Italian way,
By size of genitalia.

Our country has inherent strengths
And needn't go to such great lengths.

Jared Carter

Raven

What hammering, what hand-forged nails?
Who glides ahead
On waters stilled, with furled sails
into the dread

And solemn precincts? Still they preen
and point, those who
Do not know marble's glassy sheen.
But now we two

Shall steal along the corridors
Like perfect spies,
Leaving the rest—those orators—
To seethe and sigh.

Lee Slonimsky

On the Balcony

That summer had that brilliant sun, red gash
it left in a dark western sky just as
I'd pick you up for note-seared nights of jazz.
The heat, those saucy riffs could make us rash,
with exclamation point the yellow sash
you twirled around your robe, dropped with pizzazz
on moonlit balcony, the sea black glass...
Such memories still sear; they're love's hot lash!

If only time were not implacable
in its refusal to bring back the past.
What harm could come from flexibility?
This red sunset reminds me of how full
those evenings were, with blood that raced so fast...

Alone, I coldly ponder sky and sea.

Leo Yankevich

The Abandoned Station

Here the shades of rust are manifold.
The rails resemble velvet, thick and plush.
A dark grease from the time of the last Tsar
rests deep within the wood of sunken ties.

The platform's still, the station name in bold
Gothic letters. No pale mothers rush
their children to the last departing car
with brusque farewells forever in their eyes.

The car rusts at the edge. Has been there since
the day the Soviets sacked the sleepy town,
leaving a trail of bleeding girls and grief.

The station is a graveyard. Cleanse and rinse
it with your mind, and still a deep red brown
keeps it behind: thorn tree and nettle leaf.

Sergei Yesenin

The Birch

The birch beneath
My windowsill
Stands like a wreath
In the silver chill

Of winter, white
In the faint glow
Of early light
And softest snow.

The birch still yields
Stars at this time,
Though over fields
Sun breaks through rime.

Dawn wakes the grounds
And sleeping ploughs,
But makes its rounds
Through silver boughs.

—Translation from the Russian by Leo Yankevich

Mikhail Lermontov

The Sail

A lonely sail moves, white on white,
Amid the ocean's mist and foam.
Caught now in a distant light,
What does it seek so far from home?

The halyards groan, the mast-beam creaks;
The sail now billows in the breeze.
It is not happiness it seeks,
Nor happiness from which it flees.

Above, the sun is blithe and warm;
Below, the blue waves rise and crest.
The rebel searches for a storm
As if in storms it could find rest.

—Translation from the Russian by Leo Yankevich

Peter Huchel

December 1942

How resounding is the winter squall.
Hole-riddled the loam walls of Bethlehem's stall.

That's Mary murdered at the entrance gate,
Hair frozen to the bloody stones and grate.

Masked in rags, three soldiers limping by
Cannot burn from her ear the infant's cry.

The last canteen sunflower won't get them far.
They seek the way and cannot see the star.

Aurum, thus, myrrham offerunt...
Crow and cur come to a manger ruined.

...quia natus est nobis Dominus.
On a bleached skeleton gleam soot and ooze.

The way to Stalingrad's a smouldering glow.
And it leads to a charnel house of snow.

—*Translation from the German by Leo Yankevich*

Michael R. Burch

The Forge

To at last be indestructible, a poem
must first glow, almost flammable, upon
a thing inert, as gray, as dull as stone,

then bend this way and that, and slowly cool
at arms-length, something irreducible
drawn out with caution, toughened in a pool

of water so contrary just a hiss
escapes it—water instantly a mist.
It writhes, a thing of senseless shapelessness...

And then the driven hammer falls and falls.
The horses prick their ears in nearby stalls.
A soldier on his cot leans back and smiles.

A sound of ancient import, with the ring
of honest labor, sings of fashioning.

David W. Landrum

A Curse on You

A curse on you: may all the desert djinns
who haunt dry wastelands be unbottled; may
they swirl into your home and make demands—
not grant three things but take three things away:
your wife, your kids, you cat; and then, for you,
bestow diarrhea in a dispensation
potent enough to carry the spell through
at least ten years of rank abomination.

A curse on you: may bedbugs swarm your sheets;
may you lose every game of chess you play;
may scorpions build nests down in the pleats
of your best easy chair; may more defeats
than the Detroit Lions piled up come your way.
May every flight you take see a delay.

Frank White

Quandary

A poem is a question
It alone can answer.
A dance is a prescription
To be filled by the dancer.

The world may submit to art,
The world may submit to thought
But defies the state and mart
To make it be what it ought.

Russell Bittner

If Love Is to Cartography What Romance Is to Maps

If love is to cartography
 what romance is to maps,
then we should use photography
 to document the gaps.

As once upon a meaner time,
 when pimps held you in thrall,
you'd turn quick tricks for one lean dime,
 then let the mothers crawl

down alleys in which every stray
 would ditch most any other,
and brokers used whatever they
 could find to break a brother.

But now, if love—without its maps
 for markets or corrections—
can play with bits instead of saps
 to bargain through objections,

I'm sure we'll find a way around
 the gaps in our completion
as you sell short, and I go long,
 to zero out deletion.

Luxorius of Carthage

Two Epigrams

To an Old Voyeur

Go on and on about the girls you lay,
You loudmouthed, phony, antiquated fart.
You're older than the Phoenix by a day,
And still you want to play the lover's part?
Myopic, feeble, trembling—like as not
You couldn't put a quarter in the slot.

On a Blind Man Led by Lust

Widowed of sight, he gropes along the wall,
Probing the flesh of women in broad day;
Skilled lust has given him five pairs of eyes
And his excited member points the way.

—*Translation from the Latin by Richard O'Connell*

Joseph S. Salemi

Ten spurts of Venom

Wordsworth urged poets to recollect emotion in tranquility. A poet who was less of a sentimental milksop would rephrase that to say "Dredge up an old hate, and give it literary life."

—Derek Burgoyne

To a Blocked Writer

You claim you're blocked, and can't squeeze out the words?
You're constipated, so we're spared your turds.

To an Incompetent Violinist

A question darker than the Sphinx's riddle:
Where the hell did you learn how to fiddle?

To a Frenchwoman

You don't arouse me anymore, *poupée*—
Not since I saw you straddling a bidet.

To a Tough City Poet

You paint an urban landscape stark and gritty—
Too bad your verse is limping, dull, and shitty.

To an Unlucky Gambler

At cards and dice and ponies you're all wet—
So try your hand at Russian-style roulette.

To a Cougar

You know why young studs use you for a quickie?
Boys that age are never very picky.

To a Heroin Addict

You live a life of bliss, devoid of pain,
As long as you can find a working vein.

To a Lecherous Minister

To godliness our urges should aspire,
But yours don't rise above the female choir.

To an Overweight Hottie

You used to get guys energized and hard—
But that's before you put on all that lard.

To a Bureaucrat

You say we must obey rules and respect 'em—
We say you need a switchblade up the rectum.

A War in Fifty-Odd Sonnets

by

J. B. Sisson

Review of: John Allan Wyeth, *This Man's Army*

Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008

ISBN 978-1-57003-779-5

Published in 1928, *This Man's Army: A War in Fifty-Odd Sonnets*, by John Allan Wyeth, received favorable reviews but, despite another edition the following year, soon sank into oblivion. Wyeth published no more. Sixty-odd years later, B. J. Omanson, a military historian and poet, unearthed a copy of the book. Now, eighty years after its first appearance, *This Man's Army* has been republished, with thorough annotations by Omanson and an introduction by Dana Gioia, a literary critic and poet

This is an extraordinary resurrection of a brilliant and compassionate American poet. Wyeth's autobiographical sonnets take us from training in Texas across the Atlantic and then from Brest to Paris and on to the front and finally to a military hospital, from May to October 1918, a month before the Armistice. The vigorous style, vivid descriptions, and doughboy banter impart a rugged immediacy rare in sonnet sequences.

Born in 1894, Wyeth graduated from Princeton in 1915. He taught in a high school in Arizona for a year and then earned a master's degree in Romance languages at Princeton. In December 1917, he entered the United States Army as a second lieutenant and served as a French interpreter. In the sonnets, Wyeth sometimes stands night watch and carries messages. On one occasion, he delivers some maps too late for distribution before the advance into battle. A colonel thanks him sarcastically and remarks, "They might be useful in another war." On his errands, Wyeth passes through demolished towns:

*Through Bayonvillers—her dusty wreckage stank
of rotten flesh, a dead street overcast
with a half-sweet, fetid, cloying fog of stench.*

In a subsequent sonnet, as they eat in Bayonvillers,

*men long since dead reached out and left a smirch
and taste in our throats like gas and rotten jam.*

During lulls, the soldiers try to relax, reading Virgil and Lewis Carroll. They carouse in cafés, drinking, brawling, and singing songs such as “*Darktown Strutters’ Ball*” and, in their mangled French, “*O Mademeselle from Armenteers.*” But the lulls are abruptly interrupted. Wyeth and another soldier reconnoiter after an attack:

*A vague black gulch ahead, and the secret hush
of evil creeping in the dark—We passed
two soldiers, pain-white, and a man they bore
between, blind twisting head and drunken knees,
—like Christ.*

“Come on, Bud—There—You just been gassed.”

The sonnets’ iambs are liberally laced with anapests, and the rhyme scheme is unusual: *abcdabcdabecde*. This form generates a propulsive momentum for Wyeth’s travels by ship, train, car, motorcycle, and horseback.

After the war, Wyeth returned to graduate school at Princeton, but he dropped out in 1926. In his introduction, Gioia explains that little is known of Wyeth, and he has been confused with his father, John Allan Wyeth Sr., a physician who served in the Confederate cavalry in the Civil War and who wrote poetry and a memoir, *With Sabre and Scalpel*.

A few years after the publication of *This Man’s Army*, the younger Wyeth became a painter. Gioia writes that “Wyeth’s Post-Impressionistic landscapes were not conspicuously successful in the marketplace.” Gioia does not indicate whether he was related to the famous painters named Wyeth. During the Second World War, Wyeth served in the Coast Guard. He died in 1981 at the age of eighty-six.

In the absence of documentary evidence, Gioia conjectures that Wyeth wrote the sonnets of *This Man’s Army* shortly before publication. Gioia believes that Wyeth’s sonnets are not the kind of poems that a man would write in his mid-twenties but instead are what he’d write in his mid-thirties. Obviously, however, Wyeth may well

have written these sonnets during the war, in the fashion of the soldier poets Rupert Brooke, Charles Sorley, Isaac Rosenberg, and Wilfred Owen, all of whom died in their twenties during the First World War.

Furthermore, Gioia writes, Wyeth's poems "have assimilated certain stylistic aspects of Modernism, especially its use of mixed meters and disjunctive syntax, which had not fully emerged until the 1920s in the works of T. S. Eliot, Archibald MacLeish, and Ezra Pound." But why should Wyeth wait for their apotheoses, especially since he could read Siegfried Sassoon?

This Man's Army is a travel poem in the epistolary mode of "The Passage of the Mountain of St. Gothard," by Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, and "A Trip to Paris and Belgium," by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. On European journeys in 1793 and 1849 respectively, the duchess is writing to her children in heroic quatrains, and Rossetti is writing to his brother in blank verse and rhymed sections, primarily sonnets. Wyeth correspondingly addresses an unidentified "you."

And you are viscerally involved with Wyeth's soldiers, "naked and cold like souls on Judgment Day." In one sonnet, you're caught in an air raid:

*Frantic machine guns stutter, brusque shells blaze
in the light-swept clouds where, ominously near,
a beast wheels in the apocalyptic sky
and plunges through a stack of blinding rays.*

And soon, in another sonnet, you're at an outdoor concert:

*Then all lights out—a full midsummer moon
in the apple trees, and a lanky wan Pierrot
sings slowly, 'Roses are shining in Picardy . . .'*

The drastic wrenches between chaotic combat and idyllic respite are as heartrending as the similar shifts in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It is a great loss to American letters that Wyeth published no more after *This Man's Army*. In prosodic innovation and imagination, Wyeth ranks with such realistic American war poets as Stephen Vincent Benét, Karl Shapiro, and Randall Jarrell. May scholars someday discover a lost trove of unpublished poems by the astonishing John Allan Wyeth.

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Translated Poets

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

Du Fu (712-770)

Publius Aelius Hadrianus (76-138)

Peter Huchel (1903-1981)

Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841)

Luxorius of Carthage (*floruit Carthagine Vandalica* c. 496-534)

Marcus Valerius Martialis (c. 40-102)

Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855)

Philodemus of Gadara (c. 110 B.C.-35 B.C.)

Walther von der Vogelweide (c. 1170-1230)

Sergei Yesenin (1895-1925)



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