

TRINACRIA

Poems, Translations, Essays, Reviews



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TRINACRIA

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BRING ON THE METEORS

Our seventh issue of TRINACRIA comes out in the midst of an increasingly obvious cultural collapse—a collapse all the more ironic in the light of the technological razzle-dazzle that accompanies it. Modernity’s computers and digitalized expertise grow more intricate and complex every month, while the real-world incapacity to use language properly and intelligently has reached epidemic proportions. We have all these wondrous electronic mechanisms to express ourselves, yet the bulk of the population is unclear as to what a sentence is. Several professors of composition at the college where I work proudly claim to have no understanding of grammar, and most of them can’t write a letter without Spell-Check to help. Our alleged newspaper of record, the *New York Times*, abounds in sophomoric typos. Television newscasters spout solecisms the way Kilauea spouts lava. As for undergraduate prose, well... you’d rather have root-canal than read it extensively.

Despite this palpable decline, however, in the little incestuous world of poetry rose-tinted glasses provide a different perspective. According to the hyped-up enthusiasts who populate the workshops, we are living in a renaissance of profound creative energy, with explosions of literary genius everywhere. *Everything is so exciting! We have so much diversity! People are finding their voices! Isn’t it wonderful?* Yes, dear reader, that’s exactly how many of them talk.

James Burnham, in his magisterial *Suicide of the West*, described liberalism as a death-wish that did not recognize its own lethality. Liberalism prepares the Western world for its demise and dissolution by celebrating all the signs of approaching death as triumphant “victories” and humane “advances” and necessary “improvements.” The same paradigm seems to govern discourse about poetry today—the more the art slips into moribund desuetude, the more the po-biz types and their loyal little groupies sing paeans to its vitality and energy and vigor.

Once at a poetry gathering someone exploded at me and shouted “If poetry is dying, why help it along? You should be resuscitating the art with support and kindness, not attacking it!” Well, one doesn’t help a sick person by coddling his symptoms. One gets at the roots of those symptoms to excise or cauterize them. In short, if poetry has a fighting chance one needs to treat its problems aggressively, not consign it to hospice-care with sympathetic and indulgent smiles.

There is an absurd notion floating around that you can revive a failing art by being nice to it. I remember a literary soiree in Manhattan many years ago, at which a number of important commercial publishers were present. A young novelist approached one of them and said, in a plangent whine, “Please don’t let the novel die!” I thought to myself “What an asshole this guy is—he actually believes that the novel is in decline because of the business decisions of publishers.” His attitude paralleled that of simple-minded people who think that wars are caused by munitions makers, or that drug addiction is caused by narcotics dealers.

Ah, well... the stupid ye shall always have with ye, as Christ might have said. But rather than suffer fools gladly, it’s better to blast them with napalm and move on. And so we shall, as we turn to our six Pushcart Prize nominees for Issue #6. In strict alphabetical order, they are:

- David Alpaugh for his “Mrs. Lilly’s Opus,” a satirical sonnet on the gargantuan bequest that a pharmaceutical heiress recently made to mainstream poetry, with an allusively comic last line.
- Laura J. Bobrow for her “At (Or Rather On) the Shore,” a series of rhyming tetrameter couplets on the dangers of the ocean, incorporating a gory child-fable worthy of Hilaire Belloc at his nastiest.
- X.J. Kennedy for his “Roman Revel,” four perfect quatrains in the Horatian manner, celebrating festivity, feasting, and fornication with pink-cheeked *eromenoi*, and making deft use of internal rhyme.

- Richard O'Connell for his "Selected Epigrams," seven little biting squibs of the sort that are despised by our effete and pompous poetry establishment, but which in the ancient world were the life's blood of poetry's popularity.
- J.B. Sisson for his "To a Blackfly," an excellent parody of Robert Burns's "To a Mouse," but addressed to the blackfly of New England, and containing the same element of human sympathy for a fellow creature.
- Leo Yankevich for his "Journey Late at Night," a description in trimeter quatrains of night travel in a boat, filled with profound disquiet at the complicity of nature's beauty with the savagery of predation.

The above poems demonstrate that high-quality work is still being produced in this barbarous age, despite the general triumph of pop-cultural illiteracy. Just as excellent classical Latin was sporadically written in the linguistic decay of the Dark Ages, so too does traditional poetry flash forth, like the occasional meteor, in our contemporary night. Let's hope for a meteor shower.

Joseph S. Salemi
Woodside, New York

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Karen Kelsay

Winter Needlepoint

Here comes the cold time—holly, pine, and yew,
low grass-laced hills crisscross in winter white;
dark threads of cloud stretch sugar-plum and blue
along a canvas sky of fraying light.

The frost arranges crystals on a limb.
Flakes, falling, reappear as snow on snow
like French knots sewn above the tree root's rim,
that stencil little patterns, to and fro.

The frozen oak is filled with mistletoe,
its yellow berries unconcealed by leaf.
They offer fruit for robin, thrush, and crow.
It makes me think of emptiness and grief—

reminds me of a summer field of yarrow,
and everything that bloomed before the chill.
December brings a tapestry of sorrow,
with knots pulled through a surface of goodwill.

Wesli Court

Shakespeare Gnomes

Respite

After life's fitful fever one sleeps well
Unless, of course, there's such a place as Hell.

Philosophy

Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind
Unless, of course, one's sighted and not blind.

Threesome

When shall we three meet again,
You two girls, no other men?

Divorcee

Think you I am no stronger than my sex?
Then think again, and you can ask my ex.

Opportunity

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more
If we should find her drunk upon the floor!

Bitchiness

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
I do not think so, nor was she ever screwed.

Carol A. Taylor

Don't Talk

The books you meant to write; the Ph.D.
you're going back for in Divinity;
an idea for an on-line magazine;
a trip abroad; one more advanced degree,
this time in Medicine; a used RV
and an acre on the river near Seguin;
a dozen novel money-making schemes—

The more you plan out loud the less it seems
you have to do to garner satisfaction,
as though the word were equal to the action.
Once voiced, the goal recedes, and something new
claims your attention. Superstitiously,
I wait to speak about *faits accomplis*.
Brave words become the things we never do.

Robert Beum

Brontës: A Game in the Moors

We were unvisited: the bracken miles
invited no one. We would have to learn
the game of Heaven: loneliness might win
an aristocracy of starving love.

We found that loneliness together, there.
Heaven must be much farther on, but there,
sequestered past the cities full of life,
we found the hearts that must be Heaven's own.

Jennifer Reeser

The LaLaurie Horror

This is the first installment of an epic in *terza rima*, based on events from nineteenth-century New Orleans. Madame Delphine LaLaurie, a ridiculously wealthy Creole socialite, was discovered to be keeping slaves in various methods of torture in an upstairs chamber of her mansion in the French Quarter. The place has been plagued with a legacy of bad luck since. Today, the mansion is said to be the most haunted in the city, and one of the most haunted in all of America.

Canto I

Beneath a scalloped awning, black as soot,
I found myself at dusk, beside a street
Along whose distance I had come on foot,

Beside black lacquered doors—mine but two feet
Pacing through a pub amid a crowd
Unaccustomed to the proud, sub-tropic heat.

Observing, evanescent, disavowed,
I was as though some witness who had died,
The overhanging canopy my shroud.

A red, infernal light glowed, magnified
By lachrymosal glass and tavern fume
As I awaited my belated guide;

So tired of his delay—though to resume
My life within the world, without the wait
Would seem like flight away, upon a broom.

I did not wonder why my guide was late.
Instead, I pondered life's approaching fringe,
To close the life in back of me: a gate.

Of iron this gate was wrought, pronged, with a hinge
Constructed clean, but rusted through the springs
And screeching, so to make a deaf man cringe;

The kind to carve a stone floor, when it swings,
Embedded in its plate, an oval brooch,
The numerals of French and Spanish kings.

I failed to note the guide's discreet approach,
Attentions focused on the gate design.
He came by what? Not streetcar, nor by coach.

I knew how I had come to stand in line
As just another member on the tour—
The others round about, with beer or wine,

With flippancy to turn me insecure.
Where apprehensiveness gave way to worry,
I felt I could avoid, but was not sure.

Advising us sincerely not to curry
Proximity with local passersby,
He gathered us together, in a hurry.

“Be slight,” he cautioned, “here among the sly.”
As though to mean we each should be a ghost,
A warning from the corner of his eye,

A look which caught and held mine more than most.
“We love you all, and want you to return.”
He hooked one hand around a horse-head post.

“This is a place of danger you will learn
Some righteous in our midst would call a ‘dive,’
Which innocents and fools do well to spurn.

On to our tour, then. There are those alive
Who speculate the law of conservation
Of energy insures that they survive

Who lose the body, and the deprivation
Of some sound ‘conduit’—like love or peace—
Compels the ones deprived of such sensation

To linger with the living they debase
In forms as-yet-inscrutable, to ‘live’
As generated power without release;

That each imprints itself—a negative
Affixed to our world, whereupon the haunt
May symbolize that which will not forgive.

Some will appear as healthy, others gaunt;
While many seem to want nothing at all,
Others may manifest to soothe, or taunt.

Our fears are large, our comprehension small.
What reason keeps us dead, in this respect?
Science is slow, and few possess great gall.

Now, if you will, stay with the group, collect
Your wits and your belongings. We are off.
I ask that you would have your blinders checked,
Be courteous, sincere, and circumspect.”

Claudia Gary

Spring Thaw

Icicles liquefy, their droplets thrumming
from brittle windowsills onto the gravesites
of pampered basil and tomato plants.

Days lengthen and your garden reappears.
Snow dunes recede, spit out your crisp veranda,
ravaged lawn, bare vines, mulch-bound flowerbeds.

Your hands unfold more easily each morning.
Your fingertips will delve into the earth
and keep some of its darkness to themselves

as topsoil fills with unacquainted seedlings.
Your latest crop will quicken into new
juice-globes, new leaves wrinkled like Shar-pei puppies

without an effort. And you have no plan
but to wrestle with death for a crazed moment
till new life, unencumbered, rises from it.

Jared Carter

Your Way of Speaking

Your way of speaking, off the cuff, about
The books you've read, the films you've seen—no doubt
You wing it now and then, but in its day
It was quite fashionable to talk this way—
When you were young, and only starting out.

Across the room you'd see her almost flout
That smile, that glance, and you'd drift by, to spout
The clever things you hoped would not betray

your way of speaking.

Intrinsic to this scene is that each play,
Each assignation, ends. Success today
Is mocked tomorrow by her sudden pout,
And nothing's left—no whispers, no glad shout,
Not even, when there's nothing more to say,

your way of speaking.

Derek Burgoyne

Aphrodite Kallipygos

*Her firm proud flesh admits no queries,
Clear statement which you cannot garble,
Wherein the bust and rump of Ceres
Roll in the rhetoric of marble.*

—Roy Campbell

I've known a lot of fancy dames
Who've fanned my passion into flames,
But girl, you are my special dear
Because you've got that perfect rear.

If it had a reputation
Borne by wings throughout the nation,
Folks would come from far and near
To gaze upon your famous rear.

Other women and their butts
Are just a pack of mongrel mutts—
I tell you, it's without a peer,
Your compass-circumscribed rear.

At my age, the virile powers
Can shut down for hours and hours,
But I have a ready spear
When I'm close to your firm rear.

There's nothing like the thrill I find
In contemplating your behind—
I rise up to the seventh sphere
When I unwrap your pretty rear.

Your *derrière* is my religion—
Just bend over, little pigeon,
And I'll make it my career
To kneel and worship at your rear.

A lover rough and thoughtless might
Give those swelling mounds a bite—
You needn't have a bit of fear
When I caress your shell-pink rear.

I'll be gentle, sweet, and loving—
No hard thrusts or violent shoving.
You won't wince or shed a tear
As I pay homage to your rear.

Guys watch when you walk away,
But I'm not jealous. What the hey—
A sane man's impulse is to cheer
While looking at your rotund rear.

I don't know how else to say it—
On the line I'll simply lay it.
Here it is, succinct and clear:
I love your callipygian rear!

Leo Yankevich

Epilogue

Although the end seems near
(your neighborhood and race
gone to the dogs), my dear,

dear reader—do not cower
in fear; stand up and face
the dogs! In you the power

remains to save the West.
Put down your childless Spengler
who spawned two books at best.

Better to heed the deeds
of a forsaken prisoner
like Hess, or charge on steeds

like John Sobieski, steady
in soul; to follow Lee's
Rebs into battle, ready

for a certain death,
than to live on with fleas
upon your blood and breath.

Sally Cook

But A Good Cigar Is A Smoke

(with apologies to Kipling)

I like the smell of a cigar,
Just call me suicidal.
Under a blue-lit winter star
It's heaven to be idle,

And watch the uncles puff away
In over-stuffed armchairs
After dinner. Memories stay
Of afternoon affairs.

We called them family dinners then;
Occasions weren't complete
Without assertions from the men—
I watched them from my seat

As they discussed joy, money, grief...
I sniffed a fine aroma—
Sharp brandy and tobacco leaf
Did not induce a coma!

I learned instead that men were men,
Had beards, wore suits, and shouted;
Will I perceive such bliss again,
Or have all men been routed?

C.B. Anderson

A Nosegay of Couplets Dedicated to Coupling Couples

*When it comes to being a good lover, a guy has to ask
a girl what she wants and be willing to give it to her.*

—Jenna Jameson

Of all the apes, there's but a single genus
Where males are gifted with a handsome penis.

The most effective way to get a man's
Attention is to osculate his glans.

Though words of love be sweet and soft, a cock
That's worth its salt should be as hard as rock.

The measure of attraction is, in essence,
The palpable duration of tumescence.

If you aspire to be my liege and lord,
Then pierce me with your firm lubricious sword.

Anthony Harrington

Berenike

Don't look so embarrassed, young man. Yes, I saw
The surprise on your face when I opened the door.
I wasn't always the wrinkled, leathery sack you see.
No. Not at all. Young, I had the sort of beauty
That led men to make drooling fools of themselves,
Their mouths actually salivating with desire for me.
They filled my lap with gifts of gold and gems,
Hopeful, that I would let them fill it in other ways.
I will not tell you that I did not enjoy listening
To their flattery, that I did not let some achieve
Their desires. Nor do I think the fortunate ones
Had cause to regret the time they spent with me.
But, as you can see, that was a very long time ago.
I am an old woman now. Surely all those men
Who had pleasure of me are either dead now
Or so feebly alive that a mention of my name
Would cause no flicker of memoried lust
In their cloudy eyes. But you haven't come
All the way from Corinth to hear me speak
About the beauty that once belonged to me.
No, you've come, as all the others have, to ask
About that April day so long ago in Jerusalem,
To learn for yourself if I was the recipient
Of one of your Master's signs. I have no doubt
You even hope to catch a glimpse of the famous veil
On which, it's said, one can see your Master's face.
Listen, young man, I am near my own life's end,
Too near to be telling lies. Once, to my surprise,

I was moved by a rush of compassion and stretched
A silken cloth out so that a broken, tormented man
Could wipe away the dirt and sweat and blood
From his poor face. And for that simple act of pity,
What was my reward? A pained smile of thanks.
No more than that. And what of the filthy bloodstained
Rag of a so-called miraculous veil? What became of it?
I burned it the minute the Sabbath Day passed,
So beyond all laundering had it been rendered.
Go back and tell those among you who make legends,
Young man, that the only image of the Master you saw
In Berenike's house was the face of a tired old woman.
But say, too, that it wore the hint of a thin, sly smile.
That will be veil enough and more for all your poets—
Weaving linen, as they will, from whatever flax they find.

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Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867)
Jorge Luis Borges (1899 – 1986)
Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65 B.C. – 8 B.C.)
Yahya Kemal (1884 – 1958)
Guilhem de Montanhagol (*floruit* 1233 – 1268)
Sergei Yesenin (1895 – 1925)



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