

TRINACRIA

Poems, Translations, Essays, Reviews



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TRINACRIA

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THE HIGH AND THE LOW CONSIDERED

There are many things wrong in the world of literary endeavor today, but one of the sorriest is the failure—or outright refusal—to distinguish serious literature from pop-cultural trash. It started (as most modern intellectual distempers do) in academia, where a post-1960s breed of pseudoscholar insisted on treating the manifestations of ephemeral trendiness with the same solemnity and attention that in the past had been normally brought to bear on the great canonical works.

In 1940, if you had gone to your dean or departmental chair with a proposal for a course on comic strips or carnival barking, you would have been shown the door in a flash. Those who ran colleges back then still felt that they were the guardians of literary excellence, not skills for sit-com material. Today, school administrators are desperate to run any course that might attract the tuition dollars of a semiliterate and culturally deracinated student body. And they can always fall back on the theoretical justifications cooked up by their humanities faculty, who blandly assert that even pop-cultural trivia is worthy of scholarly investigation.

Nevertheless, there is a place for the *modus infimus* in literature, and always has been. Epigrams, squibs, pasquinades, lampoons, and erotica have been with us as long as literature has been written. They are part of the great continuum that stretches from the scrawled metrical graffito on a wall in Pompeii to the sublimity of *Paradise Lost*. What connects it all is the self-consciousness of a literary sensibility—the perception that regardless of what sort of text you are producing, you are working in the great tradition that we call the world of letters, and you are using the inherited tools of that tradition in the proper manner. You are just an artisan laboring in a venerable craft. As Rachel Hadas wrote recently, “In poetry, the how trumps the what.”

Here in TRINACRIA we print poems in both the high and the low mimetic modes. Consequently we can have sublime and elevated work alongside raunchy erotic material. In either case, the decisive factor in our choice of what to publish remains aesthetic excellence and literary

sophistication, not subject matter. This means that even a scabrous limerick or a *risqué* ballade must show absolute control of technique and language. We have no interest at all in well-meaning amateurs with an uncertain grasp of grammar. But we have even less interest in pompous and moralistic types who complain that we ought not to be publishing such “shocking” and “offensive” low poems. Any good poem that partakes of the literary tradition is welcome here. What we execrate, abominate, and loathe are those deliberately experimental and off-the-wall poems that pretend to be “breaking new ground” or “pushing the envelope” or “stretching the boundaries” of our inherited traditions. If you are a hyperventilating freak who uses poetry for emotional release and experimentation, we don’t want you. And if you are a moralizing Sunday-Schoolmarm who thinks poetry is all about being decent and proper and child-friendly, we don’t want you either.

In our view, classifying literary works as “high” or “low” makes perfect sense if both sorts partake of an august literary heritage—that is, if they merely represent different modes and different genres in the continuum. No one would dare to say that Vergil’s *Priapea* or Rochester’s “A Ramble in St. James’s Park” or Burns’s *The Caledonian Muse* were not fine literature, despite their explicit sexuality. But when postmodernists try to blur the distinction between high culture as a whole and freaky vulgarian pseudo-art, that is another matter entirely. They are attacking the heritage itself.

The difference between poems in the low mimetic mode and those that are pop-cultural trivialities lies precisely in this distinction. A perfectly crafted limerick, no matter how dirty, shows allegiance to rational discourse, wit, and the received canons of language. But something that celebrates the stench of postmodernist style-bending, with its incoherence and posturing fake irony, does not. It is merely a collage of unrelated images put together for no other purpose than to be trendily inaccessible and illogical.

Well, here at TRINACRIA we have contempt for that sort of garbage and the snots who produce it. In any case, now is the time to announce our Pushcart Prize nominees for Issue #7. As is our wont, we list them here in alphabetical order:

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Karen Kelsay

Time Bomb

He once lived in a private subdivision.
Brooks Brothers, starched white shirts, pious donations,
expensive chairs and rugs, lined in precision,
were witness to the screams of his frustrations.

He snorted coke in increments all day;
his moods were an erratic pendulum.
At times his wife would steal herself away
to pop a pill or take a swig of rum.

She soothed herself with shopping sprees. Five years
of this, and then their marriage hit the skids.
And still, much later on, his driven fears
rained down, like psychic shrapnel, on his kids.

Jared Carter

Seven Quatrains

Tradition

In olden times the Greeks, and later, Romans
Wrote simple little poems, in which dark omens
Were cherished for the truth that each contained.
Of those who keep such custom, few remain.

MFA Program

We've franchised creativity:
I publish you, you publish me.
What could be sweeter? Got an itch?
I'll scratch a while. Then we'll switch.

To a MacArthur Fellow

No, no, not the right-wing general; it was the real-estate vendor
Whose posthumous tax-dodge bankrolled your baronial splendor.
You can stop sending all those articles to the *National Review*
About the wonderfully conservative rhyme-schemes of Charlotte Mew.

To a New Formalist

How can we tell? You mean sonnets have got
Something different this year but last year not?
Or is it simply that by championing sestinas
You help meet payments on that condo in Bolinas?

To Ayn Rand

Oh Ayn, I wish your endless fans
Would learn your first name isn't Ann;
Objectivism's wrong enough
Without that gaffe among the guff.

Writers' Conference

We'll hone your talent and your skills
And, after hours, provide some thrills.
Come hook up here without remorse!
No one back home will know, of course.

The Recession

Hedge-funds, derivatives, insider trading
Devalue everything: all honor's fading.
Po-biz alone resists such vile temptations.
And Florida swampland's perfect for vacations.

Jennifer Reeser

Pantheon

Sainte Genevieve is dying on the wall.
Across the marble floor, schoolchildren call.
Below, Rousseau will never hear at all.

This monument to Man is filled with mirth,
no mention here of sorrow nor rebirth.
This mortuary earns its money's worth.

Gargantuan glass tiles allow a glare
on fresco, column, sculpture—everywhere—
as we descend a narrow, spiral stair.

A guard instructs the patrons to keep right.
This wealthy morgue, an imagist's delight,
has caused my chest to thicken and grow tight.

What happens when the sun of nothing sets,
Girards have gone, with Jean-Pauls and Babettes?
I feel this is as cold and coldness gets.

What unholy entities possess
these forms, in their weird blend of skin and dress,
one panel figure prim, the next, a mess?

Morts, morts, morts, morts, in gold on each wall written;
yet in this chill, not one glove, not one mitten,
not two hands wrung, nor any blue nail bitten.

Candace Ruggieri

Mainstream Media

The rage against mainstream media (called “MSM” in contempt) has now reached the boiling point among self-respecting white Americans.

—Derek Burgoyne

- I. Here’s the tune each network sings:
The brain-dead liberal’s view of things,
Huzzahs for progressive goals,
Curses for dissenting souls,
Orthodoxy’s pious smirk
As it does its sacred work.
That’s all that you’ll get out of them,
The lying scum of MSM.

- II. Journalism’s feisty spunk?
Please don’t make me puke. The bunk
That you hear our networks bleat
Is fakery and pure deceit
Designed to keep you disinclined
To be aroused, or use your mind.
They want you dulled and dazed with phlegm,
The lying scum of MSM.

- III. In their view, truth’s a mere mirage
Irrelevant to *reportage*—
Facts? Ignore those not in sync
With what folks are supposed to think.
“Accepted myth” is what they sell
Designed to prove that all is well.
They’ll hype and spin things *contra rem*,
The lying scum of MSM.

- IV. Look at their pretentious faces
As they hold their august places
Facing lights and microphones,
Self-satisfied and smug as drones,
Reading from concocted scripts
With their bought-and-paid-for lips.
They think themselves the very *crème*,
The lying scum of MSM.
- V. Does anybody have the nerve
To give these pricks what they deserve?
A dagger-slash across their loins,
A boot-kick in their naked groins,
An iron bar to smash their teeth,
All capped off with a funeral wreath.
Extirpate them, root and stem,
The lying scum of MSM.

X.J. Kennedy

Tourist Taking Pictures of Children in Mali

In a dust-cluttered back street of Bamako
The tourist halts, collects a yelping pack
By granting them an instant picture show:
Behold! their faces in his camera's back!

Whooping, they crowd in, overjoyed to spot
A cory framed in liquid crystal display,
A naked little sister. It's their lot
To live unphotographed until this day

When a vacationing wizard from the sky
Brings them a glowing screen in which to peer,
An instrument beyond their means to buy,
Whose cost might feed a family for a year.

A chill besets the tourist. Now he feels
His hands upon his Pentax clamp like locks
Lest it be stolen; now he blithely steals
These children, captives in his light-tight box.

Leo Yankevich

Ulysses

His head reels—gulls beneath the mackerel sky
prey on schools of pilchards, sprats, and herrings.
He holds the helm fast, tries to catch his bearings
in the mirror of a bloodshot eye.

A tempest bellows, “All clouds lead to Rome.
Light pours down on both the preyed and preying.”
Grateful for the dark, the light and graying,
he spurns his ache and calls the moment home.

Claudia Gary

Its Own Reward

What do you make of this—

the smelling of the clover
at dusk, our heavy breaths
taken together, leaning
to memorize the question—

What do you make of this?

And why does it remain
long after other choices
have been erased by virtue,
good sense, or circumstance?

Sweetness alone persists.

Sally Cook

The Star and the Crescent Moon

One recent twilit evening a young Star
Ran into a slim crescent Moon, and sat
Down with him on the terrace of a bar.
They ordered drinks, and settled in to chat.

The Star said *I'll have fireflies in a jar;*
The Moon requested double sunlight, neat.
He much preferred flirtation from afar,
But drama makes a starlet's life complete.

They flirted; then Moon said he'd hoped they'd meet,
And where do Stars come from? Star simpered, sipped,
Then belched some red hot sparks—the intense heat
Made her loquacious; she asked *Are you ripped?*

On her third jar of fireflies, she tripped.
I think I saw you here last month, said Moon.
My orbit every now and then gets tipped;
You were that hot one, weren't you, in Cancun?

You'd like a constellation, you buffoon!
Said Star... *You're young, too changeable, I've heard.*
And seeing your dark side this afternoon—
I have to twinkle; that's my final word.

Star rose, and faded in a cloud of blue
As Moon sniffed; muttered *It's not me, it's you.*

Juleigh Howard-Hobson

After the Fight

Twilight is bruised-looking tonight: pale sick
Yellow spreading from black-and-blue violets,
Green leaking out from slapped-face pinks. Huge, thick
Clouds come and blot the last rays: the world gets
Duller and dimmer as the sky grows dark.
Now this evening's colors, the greens, the blues,
The busted-lip smears of red, the sallow stark
Yellows are gone, have turned black. No hues,
No shades, no interplay of tones. Just black
That admits no moon and allows no stars
Because it is blackness made from a lack
Of light, cloud-hung, absolute. Abattoir
Dark, mausoleum dark, a painful dark
That reminds me how unhealed bruises mark.

Joseph S. Salemi

Zsa Zsa Eats *Jambon* with the Shaggy Shah

To do philology, one must discern
The difference in a voiced and unvoiced pair
Of consonants. I force my class to learn
This set of fictive sentences. I swear

They have no purpose other than to show
The way that one small sound-change can reflect
Completely discrete meaning. And I know
Such sentences will help my class connect

Phonics to substance. That's the final goal.
Sound is the flesh—semantics is the soul:

I know a *big pig* who will *buy* a *pie*.
I'd like to *cut* the *gut* of that *cool ghoul*.
Don't *touch* poor *Dutch*. I'd *die* to have that *tie*.
Dunces in our *school* sit on a *stool*.

Go *sue* the *zoo*. A *stripper* needs a *zipper*.
Don't *veer* in *fear* because of that *vile file*.
Don't *shoot* your *suit*. Remember Jack the Ripper
Slew *girls* in *curls*, but never went to trial.

Which evil *witch* compelled the *whale* to *wail*?
She *whirled* my *world*. Don't *whine* about the *wine*—
We *drink it* with a *trinket* from a pail.
The product of that *vine* is very *fine*.

Virginia Clemm had E. *Poe* as a *beau*;
The *white wight* is as *welcome* as a *whelk*.
I don't mind walking *tip-toe* towards a *doe*,
But I avoid moose, reindeer, stag, and elk.

This thistle is the symbol of the Scots—
Just ask *them*; it's a *theme* dear to their hearts.
Don't confuse computer *bots* with *pots*
And watch out when a group of *tarts* throws *darts*.

But most of all, my thanks to Miss Gabor—
That Magyar hottie with the double name.
She let me pile up sibilants galore
And so here's an addendum to her fame:

Dahh-ling! You can't imagine! Ooh, la la!
Zsa Zsa eats *jambon* with the *shaggy Shah*.

Yahia Lababidi

Selected Aphorisms

Philosophies, like roadmaps, are not to be consulted while driving.

Impulses we attempt to strangle only develop stronger muscles.

A little suspicion is petty, a great suspicion philosophic.

Ideals: maps that omit practical details—like mountain ranges.

Spirituality is the reward for suffering, superficiality the punishment for not.

Marrying for looks is like buying books for their pictures—a good idea, if one cannot read.

Vegetarianism: the virtue of the misanthropic.

The public only recognizes whom they are sensitive to.

What is actually meant by ‘free will’ is not that we can switch the stations of our lives, but that we may fine-tune the reception or accentuate the static.

Alienation: the crippling conviction that one is a minority of one.

Ambiguity: the bastard child of Creativity and Cowardice.

Character is formed not by what is shared, but by what is retained.

Artificial people, like artificial flowers, last longer.

Nothing is without its price; free-thinking included.

The need for public adulation is commonly overcompensation for a lack of intimacy.

Man may be a social animal but Thought is a solitary creature.

The more we prattle with others, the less of a chance we have for a serious conversation with ourselves.

Distinction is frequently the consolation prize for being unable to live.

Language bestows her favors on those who flatter her.

Posterity clasps to her breast the famously unpopular and pathologically intense. Popularity takes the mediocre to her bed.

There are two types of plagiarists: those who borrow because they are bankrupt and those who do so in the conviction that they better what they borrow.

Trivial concerns assume utmost importance once we have lost control over larger matters.

It is a paradox that Equality can also be hurtful to the advancement of humanity.

Truly wicked people are a rare breed, weak people are not.

Modernism is to literature what Existentialism is to philosophy: a state of emergency.

—from *Signposts to Elsewhere* (2008)

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TRINACRIA has published translations of both poetry and prose from the following languages:

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Sally Cook lives in Silver Creek, New York.
Wesli Court (Lewis Turco) lives in Dresden, Maine.
Michael Curtis lives in Alexandria, Virginia.
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Translated Writers

Antipater of Thessalonika (*floruit* 11 B.C. – 12 A.D.)
Aratus (*floruit* 315 B.C. – 245 B.C.)
Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867)
Callimachus (*circa* 305 B.C. – 240 B.C.)
Dionysius of Andros (*aevum incertum*)
Julian the Apostate (332 – 363)
Orhan Seyfi Orhon (1890 – 1972)
Palladas (*floruit* 330 – 350)
Simonides (556 B.C. – 468 B.C.)
Cahit Sitki Taranci (1910 – 1956)

TRINACRIA

A statement of core principles

We publish no free verse at all. We publish formal metrical verse only, following the example of the great pre-modernist masters, and of those contemporary writers who maintain that tradition.

We are not interested in poems that employ an excessive number of substitute feet. If we have trouble finding the stresses in your line, we will not publish your work.

We do not consider syllabic verse to be metrical verse. Moreover, we have a very limited tolerance for hypermetric lines and heterometric forms.

We are allergic to mid-line breaks, or anything else that gratuitously violates typographical conventions. We prefer left-margin capitalization of every line, but we recognize that this is not the practice of all poets.

We believe that the register of language in poetry should always be distinct from that of ordinary colloquial speech.

We believe that an excessive dependence on slant-rhymes and assonance in end-position is a sign of incompetence.

We do not publish poems that are vague, gaseous, or that indicate a flaccid and sentimentalizing mindset.

We do not publish poems that are primarily quoted dialogue, nor poems that make extensive use of quotation marks.

We judge poems primarily by their inherent craftsmanship, not their subject matter. We see no reason to publish a mediocre poem just because it trumpets virtuous sentiments, or expresses sincere feelings. We specifically refuse to evaluate any poem by the yardstick of political correctness.

At the same time, we believe that subject matter is another ingredient that goes into the overall aesthetic effect of a poem. For that reason we will reject metrically excellent poems if we find their subject matter boring or trivial or fatuous; or if the subject matter is handled ineptly; or if the subject matter does not suit the chosen poetic vehicle.

We believe that poems are fictive artifacts of a self-contained nature. For us, any poem that pretends to a bogus authenticity; or that consciously cultivates dissonance and asymmetry; or that deliberately avoids aesthetic closure, is *ipso facto* a failure.

We have taken as our watchword the sentence of Charles Maurras: *Voulant des clartés, vous en faites.* We believe that the primary task of a poet is not to discover beauty, but to create it with his own skill and energy.



Voulant des clartés, vous en faites.

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