

# TRINACRIA

*Poems, Translations, Essays, Reviews*



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# TRINACRIA

*Voulant des clartés, vous en faites.*

—Charles Maurras

*δίξημαι δ', ὅτινι θνατῶν κεχαρισμένος ἔνθω  
σὺν Μοίσαις·*

I am going to seek out among mortals to whom I  
may come with the Muses, and be welcome.

—Theocritus XVI, 68-69

# TRINACRIA

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## ANNUS QUINTUS HIC INCIPIT FELICITER

As we begin our fifth year of publication, a friend suggests that we have a social gathering of some sort here in New York City to celebrate the milestone. He proposes that it be a combination of cocktail party and poetry reading for as many of our contributors as are able to come to Manhattan.

I replied, as calmly as I could without exploding in his face, that the answer was No. I despise the fakery and self-congratulation of poetry readings, and I don't mix the sensual pleasure of cocktails with the dicey intellectual pleasure of verse. There's already too much festivity and hoopla in the poetry world.

But there's a larger point to be made as well. I don't want for TRINACRIA the folksy, friendly, social-butterfly atmosphere that American editors are always trying to generate in their magazines. We're not here to network and gossip and kibitz and be pals. We're here to write good poems and set them in the old-fashioned permanence of print. TRINACRIA is about literary composition, not about personalities or social interaction.

An editor doesn't need a personal relationship with the writers he publishes. We don't have to like each other, or even respect each other if it comes to that. Like soldiers in combat, all we have to do is fulfill our obligations to a task—in our case, to be a part of the supra-personal world of letters by producing creditable and worthwhile literary work.

That doesn't mean that we can't sometimes be connected in amiable ways: maintaining correspondence, sharing advice on individual poems, exchanging books, or even paying visits to or socializing with each other from time to time. I do those things with several of our contributors, and there's nothing wrong with that. But if we allow those ephemeral personal links to become paramount we'll fall into the morass of groupthink, conformism, and timorous

orthodoxy that plagues the literary world today in on-line workshops and print journals. We'll deliquesce into little cliques of rivalry and mutual resentment and Party-Line loyalties that have nothing to do with literature. That's what happens when people congregate.

When you try to argue in favor of the impersonality of literature and the arts in general, there are always a few buffoons on the left who jump up and start screaming about the "political engagement of art," or "commitment," and the many past writers who were involved in personal and political controversies. Didn't Aristophanes hate Euripides, and attack him viciously in his comedies? Didn't Dante take revenge on his political enemies when writing the *Inferno*? Isn't Milton filled with anti-royalist references?

All of which is beside the point. If you use your anger to create art, it's one thing. It's quite another if you just sit at an on-line workshop and send snarky little PMs to your coterie buddies about who's in and who's out, while sucking up to the Big Boys who might get you into *Poetry* or *The New Yorker*. Aristophanes, Dante, and Milton were great artists. You're just a schmuck at a keyboard. Don't use their sublime *saeva indignatio* as a way to justify your little high-school rivalries and catfights.

Have you ever wondered why the tiffs and spats and snippy exchanges at on-line workshops remind you of the adolescent yawps of high school? That's easy to answer: because those workshops in a real sense *are* high school, with the typical defensiveness, bullying, and personality clashes that are part of being sixteen years old. Rather than thinking about literature, these dorks are fixated on status and relationships and power.

Well, here at TRINACRIA we steer clear of all that powder-room pettiness. We're interested in what you write, and if it measures up to our standards. And once again we take time now to announce, in alphabetical order, our six Pushcart Prize nominees for Issue # 8. They are:

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Matthew Brennan

## Burlesque

*After Mabel Dwight's lithograph, c. 1935*

The gentlemen pack the hall  
On Monday afternoons.  
Their eyes are lights in darkness,  
Their grins are quarter-moons.

They've put all calls on hold  
Since sales are so few.  
They've left behind their ledgers  
And sample cases, too.

It's as if they're on an island,  
For now they're mesmerized  
By the *femmes* they feast on  
And no one is surprised

That hunger keeps increasing  
As the girls leg out the jigs,  
Their teeth like strings of pearls  
Thrown in front of pigs.

Sally Cook

## When The Stars Were Fat

The night's shawl warmed her, stars were fat,  
The moon a porcelain plate.  
Her presence seemed like something that  
Was dictated by fate.

Their positives and negatives  
Were such a perfect fit  
She couldn't see how there could be  
A final end to it.

He never thought that he would do  
Things he'd all but forgot,  
But somehow all his moral glue  
Got loosened on the spot.

Within his mind he played a game  
Of chess. She was the pawn.  
Though neither cared to place the blame.  
One morning she was gone.

Dennis N. O'Brien

## A Masterpiece?

The definition is now smudged and blurred.  
Is it just me, or are some works absurd?

I'm not so much comparing form to free  
As questioning postmodern sanity.

It's possible disintegration quickens  
As homage paid to barrows and white chickens.

Bryce Christensen

## Collections

The first's a case that shows a high school's pride:  
A pantheon of cups inscribed for boys  
Intoxicated with the welcome noise  
Of crowds that in a thousand voices lied:  
The lines in chalk, the nets some factory tied,  
Entranced young athletes and their fans with joys  
That, like teen dreams, have perished with teen toys:  
A trophy's soon a relic cast aside.

The second fills a field well south of town,  
Where one by one the schoolboys come when through  
With phony struggles for a phonier crown.  
No cheers, no shouts, no coach's interview:  
Just rows where champs and losers look the same,  
Beneath stone files that point beyond life's game.

Leo Yankevich

## Angel

To wake again like dew upon the blades  
of the green meadow, like a gust of wind  
pushing the clouds above the forest glades,  
at last free from desire, no longer pinned

to gristle, sinews and a skeleton.  
To wake again, the water underwing  
blue grey until the morning shore and sun,  
the crowns of elms and oaks now wavering,

the pearly gate inhuman and aglow  
upon the mossy hill, the crystal forms  
embracing April rain, the drainage flow  
flushing flotsam in the wake of storms.

Douglas G. Brown

## Between the Acts

*There will be a fifteen minute intromission between the first  
and second acts.*

(Typographical error on a play program)

The program stated simple facts  
For patron erudition;  
Including that between the acts  
There'd be an intromission.

With bated breath I hoped to see  
(A wistful supposition)  
The leading lady hit on me  
And make a proposition.

She'd throw herself upon the floor  
In passionate submission;  
And give me fifteen minutes for  
My promised intromission.

A stagehand raised the curtain high  
And gave his admonition:  
"A printer's carelessness is why...  
We'll have no intromission."

"You stage-struck guys with throbbing thighs  
Have lousy intuition.  
Now will you kindly close your flies?  
It's just an intermission."

He used to do just as he'd please,  
Until he drank that antifreeze.

But now he's silent—and I'm sure  
Declining to room temperature;

And I can post upon my blog  
That Prestone mutes a barking dog.

Candace Ruggieri

## Snivel, Snivel...

Snivel, snivel, mope and moan—  
Hear the little liberal groan:  
Groan about our ethnic hates,  
Groan about our racist states,  
Groan about our sexist men,  
Groan about a weak UN.

Snivel, snivel, whine and weep—  
Hear the little liberal cheep:  
Cheep about our untaxed cash,  
Cheep about the coming crash,  
Cheep about “the dispossessed,”  
Cheep about the world’s unrest.

Snivel, snivel, grouse and growl—  
Hear the little liberal howl:  
Howl about talk radio,  
Howl about the wetback’s woe,  
Howl about the NRA,  
Howl about the unfree gay.

Hey, don’t snivel—rack your slide.  
Punctuate said liberal’s hide  
With a .30-.30 round,  
With a Magnum’s slamming sound,  
With a well-aimed .45,  
With a shot that stops his jive.

Matthew Buckley Smith

## Open Letter to a Rapist

Having never known you, I cannot hate you.  
When I try to conjure you no one answers.  
Branches tap the pane of a bedroom window

Fifty years broken.

What is left today of your golden body?  
Dull from work and weary with life's deductions,  
Coughing once, it folds like the morning paper

Into a sickbed.

Now and then you dream of the ribboned schoolgirl  
Blushing through her makeup and drunk already  
On the smell of grass and the stubbled stranger

Calling her different.

No one holds your hand in the darkened bedroom.  
From the hall come laughter and stifled music.  
Cold against your arm are the tidy, cutting

Rows of her braces.

Never, almost never, is there a whisper.  
Neither could the boy at the hedges pruning  
Nor the girl who comes with the day's injection

Know what you dream of.

Who could reach you now that it doesn't matter?  
Now that blush and ribbon and girl are loosened,  
Love upheld, like the law, in other bodies,

Memory chastened.

Early on a day like today I'll do it,  
As you lie alone by the garden window,  
Diapered where you dream of the patient morning

Nothing will find you.

Ruth F. Harrison

## Warming Trend

My garden hums. The ozone layer's remote.  
I've bruised a leaf of sage. No doubts are major.  
I uproot bitter-cress, smooth earth by rote...  
The political world recedes like some bad wager.

No thing in open skies to help divine  
the season: No cirrus to make one think  
of cold or snow. This halcyon spring is mine:  
the calendar reads January. Finches wink.

The earth's timekeeper's turned a bit obtuse—  
a premise which admits of no debate.  
The hinges of the universe swing loose  
and reason does not carry any weight.

Climate and season, patterns long ago  
established, are undone. And this we know.

# Incandescent Words

by

J.B. Sisson

Review of: Karen Kelsay, *Amytis Leaves Her Garden*  
Torrance, CA: White Violet Press, 2012  
ISBN 13-978-0615694023

In his ode “To Autumn” John Keats remarks to an apparently querulous Autumn,

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too.

And if a sulky Winter were to complain of fatigue from the oft-quoted “A Visit from St. Nicholas” or if Winter were to wince at the bleakness of Thomas Hardy’s “Snow in the Suburbs,” one might reply to Winter, “Think not of them. Thou hast thy music too: in Karen Kelsay’s *Amytis Leaves Her Garden*.” There one may find “Vignette of a Winter Evening” and “Winter Needlepoint.” The book opens with “Winter Lullaby”:

It’s always in the violet hour you call,  
when dusk spreads infant-smooth across the skies,  
and winter teeters on the wings of fall.  
The poplars change to gold and improvise.

In spite of chill, the memory of you warms.  
Unpunctual star, kind winter brings you near,  
to break you from your listlessness—transforms  
that vagrant whisper I can barely hear

to incandescent words; the subtle burn  
of maple leaves to red, a flame of thought  
that gives the seasoned birch a breathless turn,  
as random dreams within its twigs are caught.

And if that lullaby too strongly suggests the “bitter chill” of winter, when “the owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold” and “the hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,” as Keats characterizes January in “The Eve of St. Agnes,” then turn the page to Kelsay’s second poem. “An Evening in May” begins,

I wonder what you’re up to, now, my friend.  
Does springtime find you nattering away  
to bunnies in the yard?

Yet spring has its mournful music too. “An Evening in May” concludes,

White daisies sprang up all around this place,  
the lawn seemed rich and full, deep green, but when  
a cloud disguised the brilliant Queen Anne’s Lace,  
the evening’s dullness settled in again.

If perchance you’re wondering where to find such formal poetry, seek the literary journals where Kelsay’s poems cited above were first published: the wintry verses in *Angle Literary Magazine*, *Lucid Rhythms*, and *Segullah* and the vernal quatrains in *The New Formalist*. Her work has appeared in many poetry magazines, especially *Trinacria*, and Kelsay is the author of the books *Dove on a Church Bench* and *Lavender Song*, both published in 2011.

Kelsay’s formalism is not limited to light verse. She employs meter and rhyme to write not only about a damselfly, an orange-tip butterfly, and “Sergeant Mockingbird” but also about such a somber subject as chemotherapy. “The Tortoise and the Hare” begins,

It's difficult to figure who'll go first;  
mom, with her heart attack, pinched nerve and hip  
that wakes her in the night—the chemo drip  
still in her veins, or dad, his mass submersed

in slothfulness, who might conceivably  
sit in his chair and sink into a coma,  
unnoticed, till the dinnertime aroma  
would cease to wake him (unbelievably).

The poem continues in this witty but hardly light mode. On the other hand, “Summer in Italy,” which begins, “It’s been two days since / your chemo session,” is written in free verse.

Her sonnet “A Proper Man,” however, certainly qualifies as light. After describing her ideal man, “banal” and practical, careful and precise, quite the can-do fellow, Kelsay concludes with a proper Shakespearean couplet:

A man whose principles are always high,  
until I tease him with my silken thigh.

Along these lines, Kelsay’s most humorous poem is perhaps “Photo Prayer,” written in couplets, beginning,

When cataracts form clouds across my eyes  
like fog that settles on the coastal skies  
and creaky knees require a wooden cane  
to navigate my walk across the lane,  
please help me not relinquish vanity  
to illnesses or pain.

She hopes not to wear a “pink housecoat / with fuzzy slippers” but to sport “Ann Taylor slacks.” Above all, she concludes,

Let me abstain  
from wearing spongy curlers that cause laughs  
when children see me in old photographs.

Another lovely quality in Kelsay's poems is her sense of the heritage of English poetry. She pays homage to Alfred, Lord Tennyson in her poems "Lady of Shalott," "Guinevere's Mirror," "Aurora Speaks to Tithonus," and "Mariana," she of the moated grange. The front cover of the book is suitably graced with *Flora*, by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Evelyn de Morgan.

Kelsay draws on the Bible for "Suzanne and the Elders," about the aftermath of that famous encounter. And "Amytis Leaves Her Garden" is a sonnet of Keatsian luxuriance spoken by the beautiful wife of the Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar II:

I left my summer home in Babylon,  
where citrine stars, like beveled jewels light  
the fields of brittle barley in the night.  
I left the terraced temples of the dawn  
and plum-soft clouds that fawn the morning hills;  
the water lilies, sweet and pregnant flesh  
of ruby pomegranates that refresh  
long afternoons. I miss the early trills  
of songbirds by the stream. There's no return  
to shady fig trees arching near the walk,  
or mulberries adorned and interlock-  
ing overhead. No resting by a fern.  
No apple blossom honey by the streams,  
or date palm forests waving through my dreams.

It is gratifying to read a poet who understands that formal poetry, with meter and rhyme, is not intrinsically "light verse." Many poets, editors, and professors do not understand formal poetry's dynamic coordination with heart, lungs, and legs, despite the evidence, for example, of Shakespearean and Miltonic sonnets. Earth to poetasters and their editorial and pedagogical ilk: Dante's *Divine Comedy* is not a laugh riot!



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