NEW VERSE REVIEW



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NEW VERSE REVIEW
A JOURNAL OF LYRIC AND NARRATIVE POETRY



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New Verse Review: A Journal of Lyric and Narrative Poetry features work that renews the ancient affinities among poetry, song, and story.



New Verse Review 3.4: Halloween

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Dylan Bailey

Necromancer

A match's phosphorescent flare
Illuminates the darkened room.
He lights the candles on the shrine
At which he sits; the gentle throb
And flick of flame brings on his trance,
Composing his domestic mind
To thoughts of conjuring the dead.
He has a soul in mind to call
And finds him there upon the shelf,
A volume old and venerable;
Brown-edged and brittle pages marked
In margins manifest its worth.
Its antique chant is taken up:
Respired syllables, spell-spun
In rhythm sprung, awake in his
Enchanted soul desires to forge
The same. And in this spell he sits
For hours, communing with the dead,
Enrapt in secret art until
The pounding at the door begins
By little hands in measured beats,
Demanding he come out. And they
Prevail because their spell arrests
Paternal blood, reminding him
The dead will stay till he returns–
The living need attending, too.

Jared Carter

Pastel

Each stick pressed against fine paper
made from rags—in
Turn developed from the fiber
of flowers. Slim

And muted colors form the marks
that will not stay—
And yet, when lighted in the dark,
a candle may

Evoke the shadows and the lines
of someone’s face
Emerging halfway out of time
and empty space.

Daniel Patrick Sheehan

Yard Skeletons

In our town, some of them stay up all year,
Nine feet tall, draped with Mardi Gras beads,
Sporting sombreros, beanies, Santa hats,
Twirling a baton, holding a tiki torch.
So, at Halloween, they evoke no fear
Among the children going porch to porch,
Even made gruesome by cobwebs and bats
And trickles of crimson streaking their heads.
No, they are simply the people next door,
Stripped clean of every shred of artifice,
A stubborn hangover from the plague year
When none among us could embrace or kiss
Without the whisper of *memento mori*
Arising in the chambers of the heart,
Like the last syllables of every story
In which love is torn endlessly apart.

Matthew Buckley Smith

The Mash

Now that The Mash has fallen out of fashion
And mention of its music has been made
A fineable offense in certain states,
It's hard to understand how some still talk
About that unreal decade in a tone
Of grief, of dread, of anger, of despair,
When it was always just a silly dance,
A novelty left over from the time
Of beehive hair and black-and-white TV,
Revived a while by well-intentioned kids
Who hoped to bring a little levity
To questions otherwise too grave to bear.
Who, in these times, except a joyless scold
Would still insist that some of those who danced
Danced—what?—too fast? too long? too recklessly?
And what harm if some wallflowers and snobs
Who couldn't keep the beat were shown the door?
What harm if, for a few brief years, a few
Selective institutions here and there
Gave preference to the bravest and the best,
The ones whose fathers' fathers were the first
To take those steps we've all since learned so well?
What harm if certain conferences and speeches,
If certain business meetings and routine
Assemblies of provincial legislators
Commenced, for just a few years, with a call
To rise and give one's body to the dance?
What harm if two or three left-footed saps
Convinced themselves that no one might abstain,
Not even in the company of friends,
From dancing when the notes began to play?
What harm if, yes, the odd misunderstanding
Was met by the occasional misstep—
By clumsy letters, clumsy exposés,
Careers cut short by clumsiness or just

Prevented clumsily from taking shape,
By clumsy torches raised in clumsy fists?
What kind of coward sobs about a song
A couple burnouts cooked up as a prank
For Halloween in 1962?
What sort of monster, you might ask, prefers
The brutal march we tolerate today
To that sweet simple 4/4 melody
Played under a few memorable lines
Half-sung-half-said in Bobby Pickett's best
Bad Boris Karloff as the Blossoms lent
Their disembodied voices to a spell
Cast over costume parties once a year,
Till crowds began to play it in the streets
Too loudly, and too often, and perhaps
Invited some too forcefully to jump,
At the first sound of bubbles, to their feet?
Who could deny that all of this was just
A fad that fell a little out of step?
That it was fun, that none of us knew then
How some would come to speak of what we did,
Perhaps it's unbecoming to confess.
The song was sweet. Now others have their say.
Together for a while we did the Mash.
Nobody ever really had to dance.

Ellen Kaufman

Almost November

Rubber monsters
ogle the cracked hide.
A superhero fingers
the ghost of a spider.
An evil queen gazes
into a broken mirror.
A patched pirate stares
like a deep sea diver
into the shatter. It
could cut you, don’t
touch, says the mother.
A frozen explosion
extends from where
the bullet entered:
star without a center.

Gregory Emilio

Skeptic in a Haunted Place

Connemara, Co. Galway, Renvyle House.

I.

Here at Europe's ragged western extreme,
a coastal dream of green and stoney strands,
rolling rust-colored hills, cows white as cream,
and cumulus sheep munching duff right at land's
edge; the sea by turns genteel as a rhyme scheme,
or feral under fickle storms—here it stands
to reason why people call this a "thin place,"
where the line between realms leaves hardly a trace.

II.

Yeats was a frequent guest at Renvyle House,
even honeymooned here and over the years
held several a séance. Rumors still rouse
the hotel's spirits, like the shade who appears
trudging the halls at night, known to dowse
cellphone flashlights, whisper into mirrors
foggy words, and yank sheets from sleepers' beds.
Imagine newlyweds speaking to the dead.

III.

A century later at a writers' retreat,
here among believers, I too want to believe.
Lounging by fireplaces burning clods of peat,
we talk of the night Yeats & co. tried to receive
a quarrelsome spirit, and we repeat
his cleaving commands, for it both to leave
them alone, *and* to make itself known—
moths drawn to both the shining and the shone.

IV.

In the spaces between storms there are more
rainbows here than I've ever seen, sunlight
transfigured from mist floating along the shore,
watercolors vaunting but broken at the height,
midsections missing, skipping air to the door
bursting afar from inland turf, like a sleight
of hand magic trick, thin bridges to nowhere
before which we can only stop and stare.

V.

Our final night, over velvet pints of stout,
we trade tales of the week's strange goings-on:
waking to desk lamps spazzing in and out;
doors flung open or slammed shut and no one
seen fleeing; the most ominous: a bout
of sleep paralysis, an older woman held down
in bed for hours, the first time since childhood.
We all nodded: a truth seemed to be understood.

VI.

Though none were done to me, why do I doubt?
Why question the data of Yeats's honeymoon
séance any more than a haunting of gout
in a glutton's big toe? Of course, the moon
is full as a pail of milk, the sky just about
starless. Heading off to bed, most assume
there will be more in store for us tonight…
And still I wait for my horror to write.

Katie Beswick

Vita Nuova

I had known him nine months when he asked
if I would consent to consume his whole heart.
He wore a crimson jacket, hem falling apart.
He was fey with an impish gait, spoke with a rasp.
I sipped wine—he picked his lips, filled my glass.
Perhaps, he said, I'd prefer it speared on a dart,
parsley, salt, a little sugar to cut through what's tart.
An olive on a toothpick, the wall-lights were brass.
The mahogany sheen, the long table laid white.
Gilt-edged side plates, a silver gravy boat.
He lifted the cloche. A glossy lump began to convulse.
He doused it in brandy, moaned and he set it alight.
I cut off a slice—retched as it stuck in my throat.
I looked down. My chest was a cavity. I had no pulse.

Orlando Ricardo Menes

The Harpies

Crete's coastline—
a cindery haze with cobalt clouds,
mercuric rain, electric arcs
of acid green, El Greco's brushwork.

Our cruiser
rides storm swells that crash
igneous spires,
breach a bulwark of gouache islets,
Libyan Sea.
A caïque due east
plummets down water's precipice,
splitting apart in churns
of gallium, spindrift's zinc.
St. Elmo
breathes fire on deck; seven sailors
wield dry hoses, stomp gold flames,
radiant oxides, lead-glass shimmers.

Everything
falls around me—small bottles, pens, a tine cross.
A sailor screams,
the bulkhead echoes:
his forehead cracked against the metal box
of a gas mask.
I tie myself
to the barber's chair, sisal rope with fetters
of extension cord, steel blue.

The ship groans, creaks,
jet turbines fume the air, upsetting my stomach
until there's nothing left
to sacrifice for Neptune, his nereids' entourage.
I smell formaldehyde
everywhere and feel regret for the cats

I dissected in anatomy class.

If the ship sinks
let the goatfish graze
on my ears, let the albatross dine on my liver,
let the blowfish nibble my eyes,
and I will out-martyr Prometheus, Ixion, Tantalus.

My ears pop,
gurgle, grumble with prophecy
as the bulkhead begins to buckle,
the turbines hiss, hiss, hiss, hiss—

and I see the harpies, tormentors of Phineus,
a trio of punk girls
with bird-of-paradise mohawks, skull faces
of the Day of the Dead,
crocodile corsets, and sea-
urchin pumps with dagger heels.

With carrion breath,
teeth grinding like electric guitars, bass-drum stomps,
they chorus,
We will mate, little man, and you will be consumed
to everlasting life.

They tear my bindings apart and carry me below the waterline into a void

near the keel,
their lair of copper-wire ivies
with gunpowder drupes

where they take off my clothes, their cat tongues
licking my skin raw in-between moans, screeches, growls,
and I feel the breeze of their heavy breathing,
the sap of their fingertips that soothes like aloe and honey,
then they hover over me,
pouting until their mouths turn to suckers

that suction the fluids in my plasma, bones, the tinniest of cells,
and I begin to crumple not with pain or suffering
but the tingling of weightlessness, so lightheaded, fluttery, vibrating

that I feel the rush of being dissolved at long last
to a creature without the imposition of soul
or the burden of a brain, an aggregate of enzymes and proteins

to be tossed over and ride into the depths the bony fish called Mola Mola.

Susan McLean

The Revenant

After Charles Baudelaire's "Le Revenant"

Like vengeful angels, feral-eyed,
I'll come into your room once more
and in night's shadows I will glide
soundlessly across the floor,

and I will give you kiss on kiss
cold as the moon, my dusky love,
and coil you in a tight caress
like snakes that slither on a grave.

When morning shows its livid face,
you'll find an absence in my place
that chills you all the way to night.

While others angle to finesse
your life and youth through tenderness,
myself, I want to rule by fright.

Timothy Green

Hey Dayton,
Do You Believe in Aliens
?

into
this
beam
we’d
walk
lost
arms
bare
feet
bare
even
that
moon
over
head
bald
with
this
gray
glow
face
like
gods
blur
into
mist
only
dark
eyes
know
your
star
date
then
that
slow
fall
back

down
onto
cold
soft
snow

Brian O'Sullivan

Bringing Down the Herds at Samhain

Turnip lanterns turn up—*booley*
season ends; a sacred rule
routs young herders and their herds
down from hills to the furrows
of their farms, where bonfires now
burn, like beacons brightly glowing.
Their sparks leap through the cracks in
the boundaries between the dark
and bright worlds *Samhain*'s binding
bold *sidhe* and spooks to sapien kind;
summer subsides, mummers preside
o'er rites of winter riding
back to frost the forest bark,
while in the dark, revelers larking
rarely see, just out of ken,
spirits lurking. Keening
banshees foresee folk boarding
coffin ships, like sheep abroad.

Maura H. Harrison

Hinkypunk

Jack of the lanthorn's foolish fire
Flicks hinkypunk, flares giddy flame,
And dunks us, boggled, in the pyre.
Jack of the lanthorn, foolish fire,
Wraps us like twiggy wisps, like dire
Dry wood, remorseful all the same.
Jack of the lanthorn's foolish fire
Flicks hinkypunk and giddy flame.

Sarah Ashbach

Hallowtide

Sunlight stretched taffy-thin, our bright days narrow,
and locust trees drip leaves like honeycomb
that's lifted in a hand. Fall feast, long fast.
The year matures like mead. Earth's in our marrow;
now how shall we grow old? From home to home
the children go, candy dropped where they've passed,
the wrappers orange and gold. The scarecrow sings,
"Sweet life falls down to ferment in the loam."
But see the wilting asters, still harassed
by time and tardy bees, salvaging things—
here—last.

Timothy Steele

Chapter in Autumn

I startled at the double-barreled blast.
An instant afterwards, a bird tore past.
Its craning neck and frantic wings made clear
How terrified it was of getting shot.
Watching it hustle south and disappear,
Go, little duck, I thought.

The hunter up the lake let loose once more.
Although the beach I'd started to explore
Still lay beneath a sky intensely blue
And wave-wash left the sand a glistening brown
And sun-bleached driftwood merited review,
I cycled back to town.

I hope the bird completed its escape
And wintered on some isolated cape
Or marsh with nourishing planktonic fare.
I hope the only threats there were the weather's.
I hope it found the leisure to repair
Its fortunes and its feathers.

Up early on fall mornings now, I park
My body at my desk. Outdoors, it's dark.
With age the episode grows even clearer,
More comprehensive; past and present link.
The desk lamp makes my windowpane a mirror.
Go, little duck, I think.

Cara Valle

Maintenance

A landscape crew mows down the last few leaves,
creating stripes across the church's lawn.
Strong men in uniform, each of their sleeves

has their employer's mark screen-printed on.
One stays back at the truck to sharpen blades.
Droning a solemn autumn antiphon

the zero-turn's gas engine serenades
a tall bronze outdoor statue of Saint James.
Bluegreen with age, the saint's broad hat brim shades

a beard that copper sulfate now reclaims.
The sword that mowed his body from his head,
though crusted with anachronistic names,

was made of iron and would have rusted red
were it not melted down for further use
after the executioner was dead.

The landscape crew have managed to reduce
the remnant leaves to negligible shreds
that settle in the blades of grass and lose

their saffron golds, brick oranges, oxblood reds.
they decompose into a common brown
and mingle with the grassroots' living threads.

Resting, the strong men roll their sleeves back down.
One wipes the bright sweat from his balding crown.

Aaron Nydegger

At the Villa Diodati

The year without a summer we spent on
the shore or sailing out on Lake Léman
where weather fit for winter bade us hide
from Helvetic rains around the fireside.

Nothing so well suited such a day
sunless, starless in that dreary way
as the volume left here by our hosts
filled with the lore of revenants, phantoms, ghosts,
and specters, apparitions of all kinds,
a distraction for our shut-in minds
enough that seldom did we ever lack
for tales to pass those rainy days and black.

Lord Byron summoned each of us by name
and with customary flair proposed the game:
Write a ghost story and the best of them
shall have this bottle of Château d'Yquem.

Two poets, each capricious as a song—
no single note could hold their fancy long,
so by the time we parted, summer done,
Lord Byron wrote his *Fragment*, Percy none.

Dear Polidori, charmed by local lore,
unearthed the mythos he was looking for,
a superstition rife in the Levant
where it was thought the dead come back to haunt
their native kinsmen with their evil need
to hunt them and to drink their blood to feed,
the first account that Englishmen would hear
of the Vrouclocjas, also called Vampyre.

Some fearful presence from within me called
from that dark castle in the Odenwald.

Forbidden knowledge that could galvanize
my waking dreams, to wake dull, yellow eyes.
The creature freed from all of man's restraints,
Monstrum horrendum informe ingens.

We were four, but then one other there,
held in our orbit, my half-sister, Claire
who now with child, was by the Sire abhorred.
"*Be it to me as it pleaseth you, my Lord.*"

A gnostic mystic once disclosed to me,
the gravid womb can tend to prophecy.
Then one night as another stormy, bleak
rain fell on us Claire began to speak:
Four lightning strikes flashed with just one thunder,
a peculiar oddity that made me wonder
what cloven spirit omen nature sent;
if gods or devils spoke and what it meant.
The afterimage of each flash of light
left glowing visions, fading from my sight.

The first white strike of lightning mocks the night,
but it will be so brief as it is bright.
Then I discerned the Vroucloacjas will crave
a soul to come back with them to the grave.
I saw Achilles dead defending Greece
the fragment of his life, at last at peace.
Forbidden knowledge better left alone
had turned like rabid dogs to rend its own.
The lightning almost instantly was gone,
but the rolling thunder echoes on and on.

Then five souls sitting in the candlelight
stared out into the dark and rainy night.

Chloe Cook

Ouija

It was a last resort. You were dead.
No call. No note. Just a pack of Prilosec
you'd gifted as a gag. The planchette
all but fell into my lap—didn't think a deck
of cards or crystal ball would inspire
you to ditch your spectral bed. I spoke
some invitation ("is anyone there?"), inquired
after your regrets, secrets, any new jokes:

another sore attempt to make un-certain
what was certain. That need for counterevidence
may be what keeps the mediums in business:
wispy sage smoke, chandeliers, scrim curtains,
the fantasy of it's a kind of decadence,
like *Ouija* itself, which urges "yes, yes."

Midge Goldberg

Muzzleloader Season

Midnight already. I need to leave at 4,
but all that's left to do is load the flintlock.
I know the steps but say them anyway—
getting it wrong could mean you lose a hand.
.50 caliber means 75 grains.
Measure the powder, pour it in the bore.
The flicker of fluorescent makes me squint.
Lick a round patch. Place it and a ball
onto the barrel, seat them with the starter,
then push down with the ramrod till it stops.
I smile to see the metal rod's exactly
at the line I'd painted on it as a kid.
My Gramps taught me that trick, using the mark
to check if it was loaded. Can't believe
he won't be there with me on opening day.
Well, time for bed.

When the alarm goes off
I get up, trying not to wake Marie,
but she leans over, whispers, "Good luck, babe."
(I wish there was a thing like "break a leg"
for hunting, so I wouldn't feel so jinxed.)
"Don't wake the kids."
I know exactly where
to go—I'd found a run between a pond
and bedding spot. I park along the road
and hike the power lines down to the run.
It's dark—I want to be in place by sunrise.
Once in the woods I'm still, just barely moving.
I need to be up close to get the shot,
to see the deer before the deer sees me.
Then, there. I hear a step. A grunt.
Deep breath.
Pull the hammer. Prime the powder. Exhale.
Hammer full cocked, finger on the trigger.

A doe, right age, about a year and a half.
Marie's voice from the morning in my head—
the meat would fill the freezer for the winter,
something we badly need. Another, Gramps:
"Roy, this one's yours." We breathe together, once.
The report always takes me by surprise.

M.D. Skeen

El Caleuche

Crouched behind a maqui tree
A barge of souls floats eerily
Past me in the inky night.

A party hums beneath the lights,
Murmurs and strains of music float
Faintly from the drifting boat.

The crew, the guests, the band, the dancers,
All demented necromancers,
Slide slowly down secret canals.

I pray that this ghastly cabal
Will pass me by without a scene,
But Jesus! Mary! I've been seen!

By something twisted on the deck
With one leg sewn onto his neck.

L. Newns

Incubus

Derived from the Latin incubus *("nightmare") and* incubare *("to lie upon, weigh upon, brood"). It's the kind of nightmare where you feel a heavy weight pressing on your chest or stomach.*

Twilight. Swollen floorboards groan.

I slither over rafters, mark my prize,
my object of desire among her clocks.

Where water laps the walls
with kitten tongues, my suckers
grip the tearstained bricks
as time is doled by steady rain
which drizzles hunger down the roof,
my yearning trickles down the walls
oozes through clay brick and lathe –
as thick as treacle.

She swims there in the moonlight,
her tiny feet, her tendons, toes - frail
and friable as porcelain.
She dreams me and I live. I ripple,
send a tendril through the window
grope for something tough to grip
my branches growing wide
and sturdy as a man's thigh, I let one fall
across her waist.

How still she is. How still.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson

The Ruined Séance

Heart beats flutter, candles gutter,
a heavy darkness fills the room.
Someone mutters, something scutters
unseen—unseemly--in the gloom.
A faint humming: *"Someone's coming!"*
A knock. A bang. The table moves.
Distant strumming, far off drumming,
candles relight. *"Tonight will prove*
your departed are glad-hearted
to see we have assembled here.
Let's get started." Hands held, guarded,
incense rises up somewhere near.
Whispered unease, a bosom heaves,
"Stay silent, please, they'll leave."
A sneeze.

Jennifer Reeser

No Head Hollow's Spirit Speaks

The winds that skim the Illinois at night
Still find the ragged edges of my neck.
I have no tongue, no lungs, no beating heart,
Yet currents in its water amplify,
My voice like winter creeping through the silt,
Like bubbles from a corpse that will not sink.
The only tenant left to me is shame,
And shame refuses rest eternally.

They bound us by old treaties, older lies,
When warriors' blood was weaker than bold words.
They dressed us in gray rags too thin for frost
And swore that if we rode beneath their flag
The remnant land the Trail of Tears had spared
Might still be ours when all the guns were still.
They spoke of honor, spoke of Southern rights,
Yet never asked what right they had to us.

So Nat rode north with Captain John Drew's Rifles,
Ten hundred Cherokees on half-starved ponies,
To Elkhorn Tavern and the ridge called Pea.
The night before the battle, we heard owls
Hoot back and forth across the barren ground.
Old men said spirits walked those frozen fields;
I laughed then, young and certain of my skin.

At dawn the cannons wakened us like thunder,
And Curtis sent his blue ranks up the slope.
We charged downhill, a ragged gale of gray,
Our rebel yells combined with ancient cries
Our fathers chose when chiefdoms fell to dust.
When Yankee lines gave way, a few braves took
The prize our elders taught us how to take:

Quick knives, one twist, the scalp-lock lifted high
Against a skyline streaked like hunted stags.

I saw a Tulsa youngster, just a teen,
Tumble with eyes still wide with disbelief;
I watched a cousin riding past in laughter,
The blond hair streaming from his clenched left hand.
We kept our old receipts, it seems, for war—
The Yankees faint, the Rebels want no bill.
Our tactics shocked those savage, civil men
Who murder by the thousand yet grow pale
When seeing one red hand renew old ways.
The Richmond papers screamed of “red-skinned fiends,”
Our own white captains, with averted eyes,
Denied the fine curls dried upon our bridles.

That night the borrowed cause split at the seam;
I felt its fracture open in my bones.
I dreamed of home: the walnut cabin smoke
Rising between the blackjack and the creek,
My young wife singing while she ground the corn,
Her belly still unfilled by any child.
I woke before the moon rose on the ridge
And knew the dream was truer than our war.

When Curtis crushed our left at Leetown field
And Price’s great host broke like winter ice,
I heard the world come loosened from its hinge.
Men threw their rifles down and leaped like deer,
The officers screamed curses, horses bolting,
Both shot and bombshell, feeding on the air.
I let the panic carry me away.

I slipped the saddle, cut the reins, and tramped,
Nat walking north through blackjack, barefoot, lost,
The rifle left to rust in bloody mud.
Behind me someone shouted “Nat!”—my name—
A gnat, a nothing, buzzing toward the dark.
Three days I wandered, eating frost-burned pawpaws,

Drinking from hoofprints filled with crimson dew,
A feast the white man's war had laid for crows,
Though even crows, that week, turned up their beaks.

Home, I thought—on, onward, to that cabin
Where Grace, still childless, kept the lantern low,
Wise wife who left the door unlatched for me.
I saw the smoke a mile before the ridge,
And for one heartbeat thought that I was safe.

They took me on the road at Barren Fork,
Already tasting shame before the rope.
The trial was brief: a jug, a nod, a table—
The verdict, treason, sentence, death at dawn.
My judges granted me one last request.
I lifted both bound hands and spoke her name:
"Grace…" One word that begged two kinds of mercy—
The mercy of the Lord I scarcely knew
And mercy from the woman I had failed.
But neither came. They led me to the river
With only steel on suede, no drum, no pastor.

I thought of her, how she would wake alone
And never know which shame had killed her man:
The shame of scalping in a stranger's war,
The shame of flight when brothers brawled and died,
Or shame of flocking to a flag that used us
Then spat upon our blood. The blade came down.
My head dropped cleanly in the waiting river;
My body followed, tumbling toward a sea
I never saw, so happy in the hollow.

Next thing I knew, my mouth was stopped by crawfish
Who wear my eyes like beads of clouded jet.
The perch swim through the cage my ribs have made;
The gar lips at what once I knew as lips.

The Nation would debate—was Nat a coward
Or one sane soul amid chaotic madness?

They never settled it. They only left me
Unburied lore, a school without a name.

Sometimes at dusk the boys who fish these banks
Hear something like a voice beneath the current,
A low lament that almost sounds like “Grace…”
Or nearly like the buzzing of a gnat.
They cross themselves, though none were taught the sign,
And hurry home before the shadows lengthen.

If spirits ride the river wind, tell Grace
That shame has many faces. None is light:
The shame of ancient ways in borrowed quarrel,
The shame in a retreat, and dying wrong,
The shame of begging with my final breath
To find no mercy comes—for her, for me.
I hold them all more heavy than the head
I lifted once beneath a lighted sky.

River, polish the faces of my fault
Until your pebbles forget, I once tried
To be two nations in a single heart
But forfeited them both, to great regret.
One hundred-plus lines spoken, still I’m dumb;
A gnat against the darkness, nothing more.
Yet if you listen when the owls begin,
You may as well hear my unfinished name—
Nat—racing at the bank, persistent buzz,
A word of shame on Illinois’s tame river,
Eternally pronounced with liquid gall,
A phantom truth without a human face.

Contributors

Sarah Ashbach *lives in Ohio with her husband Jonathan, who teaches politics, and her tabby cat Turquoise, who practices politics by reigning over mice and groundhogs. Her work has appeared in* New Verse Review, Dappled Things*, and* Modern Age.

Dylan Bailey *lives in rural Indiana with his wife and four children. He is currently pursuing an MFA at University of St. Thomas Houston.*

Katie Beswick *is a writer from south east London. Recent poetry appears in* Under the Radar, And Other Poems, The Manchester Review *and* Rattle. *Her book* Plumstead Pram Pushers *is published under Red Ogre's Chapbook imprint. Her hybrid book of poetry, arts criticism and cultural history is* Slags on Stage.

Jared Carter*'s forthcoming book* Heart's Forest *won the 2026 Able Muse Book Award. Carter lives in Indiana.*

Chloe Cook*'s work has appeared or is forthcoming in* Narrative Magazine, West Branch, The Rumpus, Nimrod, Southern Indiana Review*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Florida.*

Gregory Emilio *is the author of the poetry collection* Kitchen Apocrypha *(Able Muse, 2024). His poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in* Best New Poets, Birmingham Poetry Review, North American Review, Tupelo Quarterly*, and* Southern Humanities Review. *He lives in Atlanta and teaches at Kennesaw State University.*

Midge Goldberg *received the 2026 New Criterion Poetry Prize for her newest collection,* The Whole Gray Lake's a Sky*, forthcoming in 2027. Her second book,* Snowman's Code*, received the Richard Wilbur Poetry Award. Her poems, essays, and reviews have appeared widely, and she is hard at work on a mystery novel. She lives in Chester, N.H., with her husband, the poet Robert W. Crawford.*

Timothy Green *has worked as the editor of* Rattle *since 2004. He hosts* Rattlecast *and* Critique of the Week *and is co-host of* The Poetry Space_*. His most recent book is* Poems for Katie*. He lives in The Woodlands, Texas, with his wife, Katie Dozier, and their family.*

Maura H. Harrison *is a writer and artist from Fredericksburg, VA. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of St. Thomas, Houston. Her works have appeared in* Ekstasis Magazine, THINK Journal, The Windhover, *and others. She publishes heroic-couplet-captioned photographs on "Two Duties Told," mauraharrison.substack.com.*

Brave New Weird Award winner, ***Juleigh Howard-Hobson****'s poetry has appeared in* Amazing Stories, The Deadlands, Able Muse, Mezzo Cammin, Vastarien: Women's Horror (Grimscribe) Under Her Skin (Black Spot), *and other places. Her latest collection is* Curses, Black Spells & Hexes *(Alien Buddha). She lives in a haunted house. Of course.*

Ellen Kaufman*'s poems have appeared most recently in* The Hudson Review. *New work is forthcoming from* Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review.

Susan McLean*, a retired English professor from Southwest Minnesota State University, has published three books of poetry*—The Best Disguise, The Whetstone Misses the Knife, *and* Daylight Losing Time—*and one book of translations of Latin poems by Martial,* Selected Epigrams. *She lives in Iowa City, Iowa.*

Orlando Ricardo Menes *is Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame and the author of eight poetry collections, including* The Gospel of Wildflowers & Weeds *(2022) and* Fetish *(2013), winner of the 2012 Prairie Schooner Book Prize. His next poetry collection, entitled* Origins*, will be published by Slant Books in 2027.*

L. Newns *lives in Manchester, England and regularly hosts Mostly Manchester Stanza poetry group on Zoom. Their poetry and flash fiction has appeared* in Orbis, Acumen, L'Ephemere, Popshot, Mr Bull, Forgotten Ground Regained *and various anthologies and has been shortlisted for national awards.*

Like William Carlos William, John Stone and other poets he admires, ***Aaron Nydegger*** *practices medicine full-time and poetry part-time. He lives in Layton, Utah. His poetry has appeared in* Asses of Parnassus, Irreantum, The Road Not Taken, the Orchards, Lighten Up Online, The Lyric, *and* The Society of Classical Poets.

Brian O'Sullivan *is an English professor at St. Mary's College of MD, a squad member at the podcast* The Poetry Space_ *and a poetry reader at* Chestnut Review. *His work has appeared in* Rattle, ONE ART, HOWL New Irish Writing, Modern Haiku*, and other journals.*

Jennifer Reeser *is the author of seven poetry books. Her eighth, "The River Will Carry Her Sorrow," is forthcoming. Her poems, translations, essays and criticism have appeared in* POETRY, The Hudson Review, RATTLE, *and* First Things. *She lives with husband and hounds in Gulf Coast Louisiana and near Tahlequah, Oklahoma.*

Daniel Patrick Sheehan *is a poet and journalist in eastern Pennsylvania.*

M.D. Skeen *is a Colorado attorney and poet. His work has appeared in* Poems for Persons of Interest *and* The Society of Classical Poets.

Matthew Buckley Smith *is the author of* The Soft Black Stars*, winner of the Rattle Chapbook Prize,* Midlife*, winner of the Richard Wilbur Award, and* Dirge for an Imaginary World*, winner of the Able Muse Book Award. He hosts the podcast* SLEERICKETS.

Timothy Steele*'s collections of verse include* Sapphics Against Anger and Other Poems *(1986);* The Color Wheel *(1994); and* Toward the Winter Solstice *(2006). His book about versification,* All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing *(1999), was recently re-issued in a 25th-anniversary edition.*

Cara Valle *is a current student of the MFA in Creative Writing at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. Her Poetry has appeared in* Tar River, Presence, Light, Ekstasis, The Ekphrastic Review, First Things, Think*, and other journals. She lives in Virginia with her husband and five children.*