

Gnarled Oak

an online literary journal



Issue 7: Dear Friends
("The Oldies Issue")
Mar-Apr 2016



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Introduction

Welcome to *Issue 7: Dear Friends* aka “The Oldies Issue”. Starting today, we begin an experiment of sorts: a short issue comprised of pre-twentieth century poetry. I’d hoped people would submit a poem they love, like, or that should simply just be shared along with a short statement about or response to the poem. Creative responses intrigued me, and I had no idea what I’d get.

I was interested in “deep tracks” more than the “hits,” so the likes of Poe, Dickinson, and Shakespeare would be fine, but I wanted to avoid the high school English textbook standards since I already know them being a non-standard high school English teacher.

From a copyright standpoint, all submissions needed to be in the public domain and out of copyright, which along with a desire to explore lesser known works, led to the pre-twentieth century requirement.

What I got was what I always get from *Gnarled Oak* contributors... amazing work that inspires. I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together, and thank you to all who submitted and made this experiment possible.

—James Brush, editor

Translation of Catullus 51(c.84-c.54 BC)

Sherry Chandler & T.R. Williams

ad Lesbiam

Ille mi par esse deo videtur,
ille, si fas est, superare divos,
qui sedens adversus identidem te
spectat et audit

dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis
eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi

* * * * *

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
flamma demanat, sonitu suo
tintinant aures gemina, teguntur
lumina nocte.

otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:
otium et reges prius et beatas
perdidit urbes.

Catullus 51

That one seems to me the equal of a god
he, were it not ineffable, might surpass gods,
that one, sitting beside you, over and again watches and
hears you laughing sweetly.

This snatches all senses out of
miserable me, for when at once
I look at you, Lesbia, nowt immeasurable is
too much for me.

But the tongue is dozy, a thin fire
runs up my frame, night

dims my two eyes.
Laziness, Catullus, is your ill
In leisure you delight and exult.
Otiosity has long since ruined
kings and beatified cities.

—trans. T. R. Williams

///

Translation of Catullus 51 is a double whammy, a translation of Catullus's translation, or adaptation, of Sappho 31. Catullus often turned to Sappho as a model, the mantra in classical poetry being not make it new, but make it more of what it is. Catullus felt no anxiety of influence. Influence was to be flaunted. What interests me is not so much how the poet follows his model, expressing jealousy of the man now enjoying Lesbia's company, it's where he deviates. Sappho describes the physical effects of jealousy – the sudden rush of blood that ties her tongue and blinds her eyes. Catullus is as cavalier as a court poet, as cool as Cary Grant. His tongue is not tied but dozy. The rush of blood is thin. Oh well, he says, I could undertake anything to win you but I'm lazy. I love you but I love my leisure too. He scolds himself for indolence of a kind that has ruined kings and cities. Three times, stacked one on another, he uses the word "otiose." His address turns from his beloved to himself. Why? It's a question scholars worry. To me it looks a bit like the pretended indifference that is typical of the jilted and has been for a couple of millennia.

— Sherry Chandler

A Description of the Morning by Jonathan Swift (1709)

Andrea Wyatt

Now hardly here and there a hackney-coach
Appearing, show'd the ruddy morn's approach.
Now Betty from her master's bed had flown,
And softly stole to discompose her own.
The slip-shod 'prentice from his master's door
Had par'd the dirt, and sprinkled round the floor.
Now Moll had whirl'd her mop with dext'rous airs,
Prepar'd to scrub the entry and the stairs.
The youth with broomy stumps began to trace
The kennel-edge, where wheels had worn the place.
The small-coal man was heard with cadence deep;
Till drown'd in shriller notes of "chimney-sweep."
Duns at his lordship's gate began to meet;
And brickdust Moll had scream'd through half a street.
The turnkey now his flock returning sees,
Duly let out a-nights to steal for fees.
The watchful bailiffs take their silent stands;
And schoolboys lag with satchels in their hands.

///

The Tattler, a London Journal that published news and local gossip, sometimes accurate, often fabricated (like today's *Onion*) published Jonathan Swift's poem "A Description of the Morning" in 1709.

The poem is 18 lines of 9 heroic couplets (rhyming pair of lines in iambic pentameter), but despite its brevity, Swift allows us to peer into the lives of working class people as well as an assortment of bill collectors, cops, and corrupt jailers in the noisy, filthy city of 18th century London.

His language is clear and blunt; Swift does not use elevated language to describe the 'prentice using worn-out cleaning brushes (broomy stumps) to sweep the gutter (kennel), the maid who sleeps with her boss, the corrupt jailer who, for a price, lets inmates out at night so they can steal, or the police, who just stand around and watch.

Instead of 'rosy tipped dawn' He calls London's dawn 'the ruddy morn's approach.' Swift is known primarily as the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, written almost 20 years later. Although he died in 1745, Jonathan Swift's poetry is as pertinent as any rap artist or street poet's work is today.

-Andrea Wyatt

The Sick Rose by William Blake (1794)

Patricia McGoldrick

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

///

This poem was sent to me by a special someone just as we were starting university. It was a cryptic way of delivering the news that he had just been diagnosed with leukaemia, before the days of bone marrow transplants. Poetry by Blake and his contemporaries spoke volumes for this young man who joked about the changes in his life. He lived for a couple of years, dealing with the cancer instead of the traditional fun and challenges of college days. He died in the summer of graduation. A few years later, I wrote a poem dedicated to him, entitled "Red and White." Blake has remained a favourite poet, since that time.

—Patricia McGoldrick

Lift Not the Painted Veil by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818)
Marie Craven



View Marie Craven's video "Lift Not the Painted Veil" at
<http://gnarledoak.org/issue-7/lift-not-the-painted-veil-by-percy-byshe-shelley-1818/>

On Death by John Keats (1795-1821)

Sultana Raza

I.

Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.

II.

How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
His future doom which is but to awake.

///

Keats' Final Sleep

I've chosen "On Death" by Keats, as the tragically early demise of this young genius has fascinated readers ever since his poems have started resonating with the ordinary human soul.

The inspiration for this piece came whilst visiting the Keats-Shelley House in Rome. The small bedroom where the writer drew his final struggling breath is still suffused with his pain. Visitors tend to be respectful of the atmosphere of quiet dignity. The last resting place of a great man. Yet, it's curious to see life passing one by on the Spanish Steps outside, as the poet must have done, at the beginning of his internment there.

Keats' message continues to be as relevant as ever in this industrialized era. No matter how many often we listen to "Ode to a Nightingale," we feel less lonely every time.

With the spread of Buddhism and Eastern philosophies in the Occident, people have become more aware of their theories related to the intransient or illusory nature (maya) of this world. Perhaps this brave poet's works will be studied in a new light, and his mysticism will be given more importance than it has been so far.

Though his own immortality has been assured because of his works, John didn't know that, and his fortitude in face of all his issues is remarkable. Despite having financial, romantic, and health complications, he didn't fall into depression, but continued writing, overcoming negative reviews and political attacks on his writings. It's a wonder that he was able to write at all, let alone so beautifully in the midst of his numerous difficulties.

Not only did he give up the more lucrative profession of becoming a surgeon, and followed his passion for verse, but also produced an amazing amount of brilliant poems in such a short, problem-filled life. What would this gifted poet have created if he hadn't been claimed by death so prematurely?

—Sultana Raza

There was an Old Man who supposed by Edward Lear
(1846)

Olivier Schopfer



There was an Old Man who supposed
That the street door was partially closed;
But some very large Rats ate his coats and his hats,
While that futile Old Gentleman dozed.

///

Edward Lear used to illustrate his limericks with drawings. My answer is the photograph of graffiti street art I took in London, UK.

—Olivier Schopfer

Untitled Sonnet by Alexander Smith (1853)

Laura M. Kaminski

Sheath'd is the river as it glideth by,
Frost-pearl'd are all the boughs in forests old,
The sheep are huddling close upon the wold,
And over them the stars tremble on high.
Pure joys these winter nights around me lie;
'Tis fine to loiter through the lighted street
At Christmas time, and guess from brow and pace
The doom and history of each one we meet,
What kind of heart beats in each dusky case;
Whiles startled by the beauty of a face
In a shop-light a moment. Or instead,
To dream of silent fields where calm and deep
The sunshine lieth like a golden sleep-
Recalling sweetest looks of Summers dead.

///

Here is my response to that sonnet, also untitled:

Beneath the shelter of a bridge, homeless
Families have gathered 'round a fire,
Flames lick through rusted sides of barrel, pyre
Of wrapping paper, Christmas detritus.
Looking at them might somehow indict us,
So we turn the corner, walk the next block
Fashionably festive, bound for joys,
Adorned in party garb, a laughing flock
Anticipating the exchange of toys.
Our procession is watched by two small boys
Who've wandered away, as children will do
Toward a source of something more exciting.

Some among us nod at them in greeting-
All of us subdued as we continue.

—Laura M Kaminski

Binsey Poplars by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1879)

Kenneth Pobo

felled 1879

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
All felled, felled, are all felled;
Of a fresh and following folded rank
 Not spared, not one
 That dandled a sandalled
 Shadow that swam or sank
On meadow & river & wind-wandering weed-winding bank.

O if we but knew what we do
 When we delve or hew —
Hack and rack the growing green!
 Since country is so tender
To touch, her being só slender,
That, like this sleek and seeing ball
But a prick will make no eye at all,
Where we, even where we mean
 To mend her we end her,
 When we hew or delve:
After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.
Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve
Strokes of havoc unselfe
 The sweet especial scene,
Rural scene, a rural scene,
Sweet especial rural scene.

///

“Binsey Poplars” is my favorite lyrical poem. I discovered Hopkins in a Victorian literature class in college—40 years

ago. He has stayed with me since. As a poet, I find what he can do with sound practically miraculous. What a great ear! And repetition! The last two lines, so sad, so right, bring the poem together. The poem touches me in part because I love trees—and I find the same peace among them that the speaker found. Until, of course, they were felled, his “aspens dear.” Clear cutting is a popular money-mad activity now, the tree roots more shallow than the bank roots. I saw a favorite area by a lake we love—one year tree dense and lovely, the next year stumpy and it looked bombed out. “All felled, felled, are all felled;...” Hopkins came to mind right away.

—Kenneth Pobo

The Old by Roden Noel (1834-1894)

Laura M. Kaminski

They are waiting on the shore
For the bark to take them home:
They will toil and grieve no more;
The hour for release hath come.

All their long life lies behind
Like a dimly blending dream:
There is nothing left to bind
To the realms that only seem.

They are waiting for the boat;
There is nothing left to do:
What was near them grows remote,
Happy silence falls like dew;
Now the shadowy bark is come,
And the weary may go home.

By still water they would rest
In the shadow of the tree:
After battle sleep is best,
After noise, tranquility.

///

Ferry-Luggage by Laura M Kaminski

I, too, stand upon this shore
Barefoot, with my toes in foam:
I will need my shoes no more;
I am only going home.

It is hard to hold in mind
All the blessings I've received:
Every person who was kind
Every comfort when I grieved.

I am waiting for the boat
My hands filled with memories,
And my basket overflows
With life's generousities;
Will the boatman ferry me
Though I have not come empty?

Time to leave this carnival,
Curtsy deeply to the host;
Time to catch a ride back home:
Barefoot; heart full; board the boat.

Dear Friends by Edward Arlington Robinson (1896)

Patrick G. Metoyer

Dear friends, reproach me not for what I do.
Nor counsel me, nor pity me; nor say
That I am wearing half my life away
For bubble-work that only fools pursue.
And if my bubbles be too small for you,
Blow bigger than your own: — the games we play
To fill the frittered minutes of a day,
Good glasses are to read the spirit through.

And whoso reads may get him some shrewd skill;
And some unprofitable scorn resign.
To praise the very thing that he deplores: —
So friends (dear friends), remember, if you will,
The shame I win for singing is all mine,
The gold I miss for dreaming is all yours.

///

Edwin Arlington Robinson, a triple Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry, experienced childhood tribulations and adulthood unrequited love — which may have contributed to the somber (if not pessimistic) tone of many of his poems and stories (like “Richard Cory”). “Dear Friends” departs somewhat from that characterization of his works. Written more than a century ago, “Dear Friends” is applicable to present-day creatives who can’t resist the lure of the fanciful, the imaginative, the magical pursuit of unique bubbles to add sparkle to daily lives – while not denying others their own individual opportunities for the prize inside a Cracker Jack box.

—Patrick G. Metoyer

Editor's Note

This was a short issue, so I'll keep the note short too. As I wrote in the intro, I had no idea what to expect when I put out the call for submissions back in November of last year. It took a while for these ten poems to show up in my in-box, but they were worth it. I had not read any of them before.

The responses are equally wonderful. Reader and previous issue contributor Joan Leotta even described it as being like a poetry course, and that's how I came to think of it too. I never took a poetry class in college so this was a way for me to expand my horizons a bit. I hope it has done likewise for you.

With gratitude and thanks,

James Brush, editor
April 2016

Contributor Bios

Sherry Chandler has published two volumes of poetry, *The Wood Carver's Wife* and *Weaving a New Eden*, both from Wind Publications.

Marie Craven is a media maker and musician from the Gold Coast, Australia. She has been engaged in online collaboration since 2007 and has contributed to works with artists in many different parts of the world.
Website: pixieguts.com

Laura M Kaminski grew up in Nigeria, went to school in New Orleans, and currently lives in rural Missouri. She is an Associate Editor at *Right Hand Pointing*. More about her poetry is available in her interview with [THE STRONG LETTERS](#).

Patricia McGoldrick is a Kitchener, ON, Canada poet-writer, inspired by the everyday. Patricia is a member of The Ontario Poetry Society and the League of Canadian Poets. Poems found in anthologies & posted online. Check out words at [PM27's blog](#). New year, new blog forthcoming at patriciamcgoldrick.com.

When he is not engaged in visual arts, Colorado resident **Patrick G. Metoyer** enjoys reciting and performing his creative writings. His poetry and prose in the past few years have been featured in Grand Valley Magazine. Several ekphrastic poems are online: www.ekphrastic.net

Kenneth Pobo has a book forthcoming from Blue Light Press called *Bend Of Quiet*. His recent work has been in: *Weber: The Contemporary West*, *Floating Bridge*, *The Queer South* (anthology), and elsewhere.

Of Indian origin, **Sultana Raza** has an M.A. in English Literature. Her articles have appeared in many publications in English and French. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines, including *Ancient Heart Magazine* (Australia), *London Grip* (UK), *Caduceus* (Ed. Yale University, USA), *Beyond Bree*, (an American MENSA newsletter), and *The New Verse News*. Recently, more have been published in *Catch and Release* (Columbia's online Journal), and *Indiana Voices Journal*. Find her online at sultanaraza.com & sultanaraza.tumblr.com.

Olivier Schopfer lives in Geneva, Switzerland, the city with the huge lake water fountain. He likes capturing the moment in haiku and photography. His work has appeared in *The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2014* as well as in numerous online and print journals. He also writes articles in French about etymology and everyday expressions at [Olivier Schopfer raconte les mots](http://OlivierSchopfer.com).

T. R. Williams is a woodcarver who translates Catullus for pleasure.

Andrea Wyatt writes poetry and fiction and is the author of three poetry collections and co-editor of *Selected Poems by Larry Eigner*, *Collected Poems by Max Douglas*, and *The Brooklyn Reader*. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *BY&BY*, *The Copperfield Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Hanging Loose* and *Blast Furnace*.