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# Dirge For An Imaginary World

## Poems

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*Dirge For An Imaginary  
World Poems*

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**BERRY PAGE**

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*Motherland* Able Muse Press

*Naked for Tea*, a finalist in the Able Muse Book Award, is a uniquely uplifting and inspirational collection. Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer's poems are at times humorously surreal, at times touchingly real, as they explore the ways in which our own brokenness can open us to new possibilities in a beautifully imperfect world. *Naked for Tea* proves that poems that are disarmingly witty on the surface can have surprising depths of wisdom. This is a collection not to be missed.

**PRAISE FOR NAKED FOR TEA** Most anyone can make lemonade out of lemons. However, Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer's welcoming voice, receptive heart, artistic mastery, and empathic

vision become an alchemy of being. Out of mudslides, misunderstandings, the exploits of Wild Rose, deep loss, and chocolate cake that sinks in the center, she makes courage, care, joy, and compassion. When "what's the use" breaks down the back door, she is there, her great good soul encouraging us to sigh, laugh, renew our attention, and feel grateful for and delighted by any cake that sinks in the center. — Jack Ridl, author of *Practicing to Walk Like a Heron* and *Saint Peter and the Goldfinch* Heart-thawingly honest, deliriously sexy, and compassionate down to the fingertips. A book of kindness and bewilderment and delight from one of our best poets. — Teddy Macker, author of *This World There is still rich ore in the Colorado San Juans*. Rosemerry Wahtola

Trommer is a treasure. In an era of seeming nonstop, subject-matterless, first person mirror dancing at the Temple of Narcissus incomprehension, it is a delight to find a poet who can tell a crackling story laced with gorgeous imagery and euphony that will appeal to the ancient seats of learning: the heart, belly, and brain. These are poems Sappho and Horace would love: they delight and instruct. They can be read and sung, and they will echo from the proverbial Colorado mountaintops through the archetypal red rock canyons of your mind. Prepare thyself to be smitten and to fall in love. — David Lee, Utah State Poet Laureate emeritus, author of *Last Call* and *A Legacy of Shadows* Reading Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer is to float upon a never-ending

waterfall of wonder . . . Pay attention. The elegance of her simplicity will blind you to her mastery. Then, she will let you fall, head over heels, in Love. With everything. — Wayne Muller (from the foreword), author of *Sabbath and Legacy of the Heart*

*Poems* Able Muse Press

Richard Wakefield's third collection of poetry, *Terminal Park*, bears truthful and often wryly humorous witness to a wide range of human experience. His portraits of life in rural Washington State are particularly compelling, in a way that evokes the best of Frost without sacrificing Wakefield's own distinctive voice. A showcase of given and nonce forms, *Terminal Park* is the work of a master craftsman, delivered with wit, empathy, and grace. PRAISE FOR

TERMINAL PARK Richard Wakefield's Terminal Park is a triumph from a master of formal poetry with a bit of a Zen streak. Alternately wistful, wry, and joyous, Wakefield takes on a wide range of subjects without anger or rhetoric. My favorites were the many elegiac landscape poems, which reminded me of the some of the best poems of Robert Frost. —A.M. Juster, author of *Wonder and Wrath* This new volume reveals a poet whose mastery of form will amaze readers. Richard Wakefield lives deeply in his world, past and present, touching and feeling everything that surrounds him, alert to every texture, “the grain of wood, the grit of sand.” He scans memory, repossessing luminous and sometimes uncanny moments from his past. A poem is, of course, a system of

linked sounds, and Wakefield’s ear never misses the chance for a linking echo. In fact, I love the internal and external rhyming here, done without flash, with a kind of holy decorum. The seasons course through these poems, in literal and figurative flight, but the poet asserts with good reason that “an old man at his kitchen window sees / by winter light.” And it’s the clarity of winter light that makes these poems shimmer. I will return to the pages of Terminal Park again to revel in their wisdom and grace notes. —Jay Parini, author of *New and Collected Poems: 1975–2015* Terminal Park ranges widely and dives deep. The book’s opening lines, where bleak subject matter is conveyed by lilting verse, tell us a lot about what will follow: “‘Terminal Park’ reads the vine-covered

sign / where junkies and drunks reach the end of the line.” The poet’s mastery is evident throughout, whether depicting desolate rural vignettes, or vividly rendered moments of Biblical, literary, or personal history. Though many poems seem haunted by entropy, decay, suffering, and loss—“The Work of Darkness”—they are leavened by stoicism and humor. Beautifully organized and reflecting a lifetime’s hard-won wisdom, the collection as a whole is not merely enjoyable. It is exhilarating. —Bruce Bennett, author of *Just Another Day in Just Our Town*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Richard Wakefield earned his PhD in American literature from the University of Washington and has taught college humanities for forty-two years, thirty-five of them at Tacoma

Community College. For over twenty-five years he reviewed poetry, fiction, and literary biography for the *Seattle Times*. His first book, *Robert Frost and the Opposing Lights of the Hour* (Peter Lang Publishing), was a study of Frost’s poetry in the context of his life and times. His first collection of poems, *East of Early Winters* (University of Evansville Press), won the Richard Wilbur Award. His second collection, *A Vertical Mile* (Able Muse Press), was short-listed for the Poet’s Prize. His poem “Petrouchka” won the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award. He and his wife, Catherine, have been married forty-eight years and have two daughters, two sons-in-law, and two grandchildren.

**Poems** Able Muse Press

""My Dad's boring! Yes he is a boring

Dad!"" Or is he..... Take a trip through this book with a young snail and his Dad, and discover whether or not Daddy snail really is boring after all. Includes colour and tell pages. That gives you and your children the chance to create your own story, that changes every time.

And after All Able Muse Press

Martin McGovern's *Bad Fame* muses on the perplexities and certainties of the human condition, often in soaring eulogies and searing elegies: as in "The Circle of Late Afternoon" which asks, "Isn't there an art to giving myself away slowly like wheat opening to the sun?"; or, "Processionalia," where "a bee/ abandons the tea roses/ and circle that black blossom of/ the widow's veiled face as if her tears were/ pollen and the bee could feather/ its legs with grief." Be

it lore set in Colorado, or farther out, the personal and regional tributes unravel the universally familiar and pertinent. McGovern's debut collection is the work of a seasoned master in command of craft and themes. **PRAISE FOR BAD FAME:** Martin McGovern's long-awaited, well-constructed first book gives itself away slowly, artfully. It is carefully considered, quietly passionate, and deeply humane. —Edward Hirsch There is an unforsaken paradise in these pages, and a lot of ungodly anxiety. . . . Like *Dubliners*, *Bad Fame* darkens, deepens, darkens through its sections, understanding with Joyce the tidal pull of place that will never let us survive if we resist the current . . . the "blue snow," not of Dublin, but of memory, of Colorado . . . this extraordinarily unique

McGovern flair for the Keatonish (Buster) aside mixed with lyrical intellection, these poetic rooms with their many blue lights, direct or indirect, for us to turn on as night comes on. —David Lazar (from the foreword) Here are exacting sentences, any number irregularly hugged into the ferocious clusters which are Mr. McGovern's poems. My likely favorite, "If the Light Could Kill Us," does heavy duty as a garden unfurled at dawn, the beloved "still sleeping,/ flame-pink welts our love leaves on your almost/ too delicate skin, brazen in this light." And then the assault of a very different sentence, "Samuel Johnson is dead. And Mrs. Thrale./ And the kind cherub of a straitjacket/ she kept closeted should reason fail/ him thoroughly, where's that deck-coat

now?" followed by other people's torments inspected so closely that this morning "violence/ lingers like the last touch of a season." Hence: "Only as I rise to pull the window's shade/ do you wake, dusted and dazed, as from a fever." Strong as they are, the sentences, like the centuries, are treated pitilessly, as you can hear, yet there is what the poet calls "the shimmer of a teen movie" throughout. Resilient art, and no loitering. —Richard Howard

**Vellum - Poems** Able Muse Press  
Slingshots and Love Plums, Wendy Videlock's third full-length collection, sometimes evokes the lightheartedness of *The Dark Gnu and Other Poems* previous to it, sometimes enchants with the frolics and insights of her *Nevertheless* debut. It especially shines



with the brilliance of its wit, its spirituality—as in Videlock’s fiat lux invocation for her “Dear Reader” “resembling the first, or the last word.” Harnessing proverbs, myths, paeans, execrations, riddles, and pithy odes to the natural world and the people around her, Videlock delivers an inspired collection that rollicks, startles and uplifts. PRAISE FOR SLINGSHOTS AND LOVE PLUMS: From its title to its last poem, Wendy Videlock’s Slingshots and Love Plums offers a delicious variety of treats, from witty send-ups of contemporary mores to somber reflections on mortality, love, and friendship. The pleasures include off-kilter rhymes, elegant turns, earthy revelations, and the skillful mockery of pretentiousness in its various forms.

—David Caplan, author of *In the World He Created According to His Will*  
Videlock arrests because she arrests the complacent drift of sense. She is so good at it that what begins as a taste for her work can quickly turn into a craving—for deliciously cryptic spiritual riddles.

—David J. Rothman, author of *Part of the Darkness*, from the foreword  
Wendy Videlock’s poems in *Slingshots and Love Plums* sometimes hint at their Colorado origins but are never pinned down by a locality or a life story. They are gleefully universal, taking delight equally in huge abstraction and intimate real-worldliness. Whether enchanting, imploring, or arguing, they always fascinate, concentrating their acrobatics of thought and sound on the knots of the human experience. —Maryann Corbett,

author of *Mid Evil* Wendy Videlock is one of the few poets I can still read at length and purely for pleasure. Playfully wise, sharp-tongued, and surprising as ever, *Slingshots and Love Plums* is yet another treasure to be read and reread at your leisure. Thereafter you'll find all your thinking is rhymed—but, don't mind: it's just dust from the master. —Timothy Green, editor of *Rattle*

*Poems* Able Muse Press

Alfred Nicol's *Animal Psalms* begins with the baseball field's organized uncertainties, and continues on many a trajectory of animal ruminations—with the human species well accounted for—ending in the imbalance of the everyday "Nuts" around us. The subjects include the elephant, snake, sheep, skunk, bee, couple dynamics, the trials

and triumphs of the ruler or the everyman. This is a collection rich in aphorisms on the bright and shady spectra of our interactions. Recognizable soliloquies with the meditative self or dialogues with the beloved are unraveled for keen insights on the human condition—deconstructing them until the knotty connecting threads are exposed. Nicol gives us a mature collection of quiet reflection, with wit and wisdom deployed through finely crafted poems of masterly formal dexterity. PRAISE FOR ANIMAL PSALMS: Dear reader, I've fallen in love with this book, and that will happen to you too. Read, for instance, the very last poem, "Nuts," and read the great "How to Ignore an Invisible Man," and you're hooked forever. Read all the rest, these

poems by Alfred Nicol which have our numbers, and have his own too, that tell about our lives, and his, and the lives of snakes, and bees, and elephants, with such humor, and pity, and praise, for all of us, human and animal, in our situations. It's impossible not to fall in love. —David Ferry, author of *Bewilderment*, winner of the National Book Award As the title *Animal Psalms* suggests, there is reverence here—a reverence that derives less from religion than from a religious attention to the things of the world, from baseball games to zoo elephants to the newly beloved. Nicol is a melodic writer, called first to the music of words, to “speech that lets the sound/ carry the greater part of what is said.” He’s also a poet whose images you won’t soon forget. They summon the

real world and simultaneously render it otherworldly. While the poems offer moments of ecstatic escape, they’re more often held in check by an Augustan wit, ironic humor and a touch of Baudelaire. Poise and wit prevail in these psalms; they give us both despair inflected by light and illumination held fast by darkness. —Erica Funkhouser, author of *Earthly* If we would only take the time to let one of Alfred Nicol’s poems sink in through the brilliant latticed grid of its formal exterior, how the truth of what he has to say about the human condition would hit us the way a line drive whips toward you on a dreamy summer’s afternoon, startling you back into the electric now. I love these poems because they evoke for me the zany, spiritual energy of the Beats welded as

only a workman can work unwieldy things to the tempered grid of six centuries of formalism. Don't be surprised if—after reading these poems—you find them turning back to their true subject, dear reader, which turns out to be none other than you.

—Paul Mariani, author of *Epitaphs for the Journey*

Able Muse Press

*Dirge for an Imaginary World: Poems* Able Muse Press

Poems Able Muse Press

Rhina P. Espaillat's *And after All* meditates on the passage of time. The perspective sweeps from the panorama of foreign landmarks to the close view of a lover's feet in failing health, held and cared for. *And after All* displays the wit, wisdom, subtle voice, and supple

mastery of forms that have established Espaillat as a contemporary master. This long-awaited collection from Espaillat is a treat not to be missed. PRAISE FOR AND AFTER ALL Rhina P. Espaillat's *And After All* combines the formal fluency of Richard Wilbur, the precision of Elizabeth Bishop, and the easy conversational tones of Frank O'Hara, and yet her poems speak in a voice that is distinctively her own. They address the loss of loved ones and loved things of the world, but their extraordinary empathy and gentle wit keep them from becoming depressing or sentimental. Savor this book and share it with people you love. —A. M. Juster, author of *Sleaze & Slander: New and Selected Comic Verse, 1995–2015* Rhina P. Espaillat, more than any living poet in English,

gives ordinary language the glow of the sacred. Workaday words, trite with custom like thin coins, accrue new resonance and weight; plain objects are haloed with aureoles like figures in gold mosaics. Saints with their visions used to do this: wave away the veils that separate our shallow perceptions from a deeper reality. But not everyone is granted visions. How much harder it is to use the same words we all use and misuse, the same objects we all touch and ignore, common experiences we dismiss, and, by using words with precision, using the serendipity of rhyme, and the convention of metrical patterns, to give the reader the experience of revelation. Craft is not the opposite of inspiration, Espaillet reminds us, it is the only way to it. —A. E.

Stallings, author of *Olives For most of its poems And After All* is, as the title indicates, deeply elegiac in tone. There are many poignant evocations of the past in the book, rich with quotidian surface detail but always suffused with undemonstrative but palpably real emotion. A poem about the poet's grandmother, a tough no-nonsense farmer's wife who described how cows inarticulately but unmistakably grieved when they realized their calves were to be slaughtered, ends with the line, "She told it simply, but she faltered there." In its quiet pathos the line seems to sum up much of the book; exactness, no fuss, unforced fidelity to the anecdote, but the tremor of poignant empathy always present. A very eloquent collection of beautifully crafted poems, and one that

it is hard to read dry-eyed. —Dick Davis, author of *Love in Another Language*  
**Able Muse, Summer 2016 (No. 21 - print edition)** Able Muse Press

The recurrent theme of “home” connects the wide-ranging subjects of Lorna Knowles Blake’s *Green Hill*. These exquisitely crafted poems in free verse and metrical forms include conversations with such masters as Homer, Blake, Lorca, Saint John of the Cross, Giacomo Puccini, and Duke Ellington, in addition to reflections upon marvels of the natural world—oceans, flowering trees, birds’ nests. *Green Hill* is delightful, enlightening and inspirational, and an exceptional winner of the 2017 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR GREEN HILL In the poems in *Green Hill*, Lorna Knowles Blake takes the intimacies of

human life and the riots of nature and transmutes them into forms that both discipline and liberate their beauty. By doing so, she also reveals the real, the secret, sovereign of that beauty—the human imagination, of which hers is a triumphant example. — Vijay Seshadri, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, author of *3 Sections Whatever* subject Lorna Knowles Blake turns her hand to, she displays a prosodic surefootedness and a continual freshness of perception. Poems as different from one another as “Glosa” and “The Allure of the Ledge” will find readers to admire not only Blake’s skill but the literary culture that she makes her own. — Charles Martin, 2017 Able Muse Book Award judge, author of *Future Perfect* Lorna Knowles Blake gives us *Green Hill*, poems both dark and

lightheartedly inventive, the craft casual, poised—and audacious. Here, our twenty-first century Blake boldly converses with her nineteenth-century namesake, William Blake, as well as with Duke Ellington, St. John of the Cross, and others in musically dazzling poems set “free to feel/ the hook, the dock, the sun, the real/ experience.” What is the real experience? It is the sense of home. The title poem begins, “So many ways to remember a house,” and Blake means all abodes, from a hermit crab’s shell to a “refugee’s home/ the day after the raid.” Relationships, too, become houses as Blake evokes moments of tenderness in a mature marriage and fears for the future—though in this deft, understatedly mythic book, the background world is still shades of

green. — Molly Peacock, author of *The Analyst Moving* and masterful, the poems in Lorna Knowles Blake’s *Green Hill* don’t just reveal an exquisite formal sensibility—they conduct passionate and original meditations on our fundamental need for form. In poems about artwork and landscape, myth and love, Blake considers the ways we give shape and meaning to our lives. And her poems are themselves vital enactments of that same urge. American poetry is richer for this superb collection. — Peter Champion, author of *El Dorado*  
 Able Muse Press  
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by the anonymous Gawain-Poet (or Pearl-Poet) is, like *Beowulf*, one of the greatest classics of English literature. Hailed as the finest Arthurian romance, this

technically brilliant tale of enchantment, faith, temptation, and chivalry is tautly constructed, with a wonderfully rich vocabulary and vivid language that blends sophisticated atmosphere with psychological depth. John Ridland's new Modern English translation, unlike most presentations, is complete, covering every passage and word of the Middle English, Northwest Midland dialect original with the same line numbering, contents and meaning. His is the only version written in a familiar modern meter—pleasurable to modern ears, yet retaining the spirit of repetition and alliteration of the medieval original. And Dr. Ridland's introduction and notes are enlightening. This translation is a must-have for unlocking all the pleasures and delights of the original classic. PRAISE

FOR JOHN RIDLAND'S TRANSLATION:  
 With his loving rendition of a great classic into vigorous metrical lines, John Ridland has given Sir Gawain and the Green Knight a fresh lease on life. I've seen several other versions of this masterpiece, but none so engagingly readable as Ridland's. His preface, too, is useful and illuminating. Here is a book to enjoy right now and to cherish forever. —X.J. Kennedy  
 John Ridland gives us a recognizably English Gawain, and a very pleasurable one at that. The language is ours. It is slightly elevated, as befits a work so finely crafted, but only enough to demand our attention. Originally written in the same alliterative verse as Beowulf, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was archaic in its own day; now, over six-hundred years later,



alliterative verse can be as inaccessible as the pentatonic harp tunes that apparently accompanied it. Ridland gives the poem a long, loose line that sings in the lyrical passages, creeps in the spooky ones, and cavorts in the comic ones. Just as important, the densely mythic ethos, fully intact, enriches every word. —Richard Wakefield Panoramas of banqueting and hunting, closely observed rituals of dressing, arming, and game preparation, and rich descriptions of landscape and weather—Ridland’s translation presents these in all their delightful, over-the-top particularity. —Maryann Corbett (from the foreword) The language in which the consummate poet and translator John Ridland serves up this delicious story in verse is exactly what it deserves. The

descriptions are exuberant, the narrative flows and exhilarates like the wine at the courts we’re asked to imagine, and the exchanges between complex characters so subtly flavored by intelligent diplomacy that it makes the dialogue of much current fiction seem, by contrast, like a six-pack on the front stoop. Read this book. I suspect that, like all enchantments, it shifts and assumes different forms to different eyes. But I do guarantee surprises, and inexhaustible delight. —Rhina P. Espailat  
Able Muse Press  
Chelsea Woodard’s Vellum, a finalist for the 2013 Able Muse Book Award, propels the reader along new paths of discovery in the quotidian as in the mythical. Its scope is far-ranging: a flower press received as a gift in childhood, Tarot

reading with a favorite aunt, unexpected reflections at a tattoo parlor, reminiscing about an old flame, the discovery of rare volumes at the local library, or auctioning off old toys on eBay. Woodward's insights and sensibilities in the visual and performing arts are deftly realized in fine or broad strokes—as in "Coppélia," "The Painter and the Color-blind," "Degas's Nudes," or as in "Still Life," which muses that "It's difficult/ to give back life/ to what's been cut off from the living." Stories and scenes represented in popular artwork are reimagined in ekphrastics such as "Self Portrait as the Allegory of Painting." With excursions into the surreal, myth is made, lived or remade, as in "Philomela," "Pegasus" and "The Feral Child." This is an exquisite debut

collection that rewards the mind and senses with its formal impetus and deft musicality, its precise and lively language, its emotional compass. PRAISE FOR VELLUM: In her stunning first collection, *Vellum*, Chelsea Woodard offers us poems whose lucidity of attention grounds an imaginative realism where narrative becomes speculation, witness becomes mystery, and the body a space where desire and dread complicate compassion's summons to the social order. The honed music here thus reveals a deeper vulnerability. Such is its gift, the way in which poems might be rooted to the difficulty and heartbreak of the physical and yet apart, "their keel and gristle finally set/ into some deathless, disembodied flight." An astonishing book. -Bruce Bond In

addition to her emotional maturity, part of what makes these poems memorable is Woodard's obvious mastery of language, her flawless sentences, the surprising way those sentences function and "mean" within the lines, the lines within the forms. -Claudia Emerson (from the foreword) Not the least of the attractions of this gifted young poet's first book is the exquisite, searing precision of her language—the obsessively exact diction; the tropes that map with such stunning accuracy the emotional contours of her narratives; the gestural, almost tactile quality of her syntax—all of these talents focused sharply on what Howard Nemerov said was the singular, most difficult achievement of poetry: "getting something right in language." I predict

for Chelsea Woodard a long and enviable career. -B.H. Fairchild  
Time Is Always Now Able Muse Press  
Aaron Poochigian's prizewinning second collection of poetry, *Manhattanite*, is by turns frenzied and focused. It examines New York's juxtaposed symbols of towering achievement and monumental desolation, and then traverses the country to California's Central Valley, where the poet reclaims his grandparents' home. Poochigian consistently entertains, whether his theme is lamentation or celebration—a grizzled urban pigeon (scavenging for "the sort of faith/ that holds for here and now and vibes like song") or an Ohio wind turbine (an "ungatherable/ iron flower" seen "juggling . . . / three arms' worth/ of gale-force wind"). *Manhattanite*

is, deservedly, the winner of the 2016 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR MANHATTANITE: In Manhattanite, Aaron Poochigian takes on the role of American flâneur for the twenty-first century, drifting through the frenetic metropolis at a dreamer's planetary pace. This collection is a celebration of exuberant melancholy, or melancholy exuberance, slick lyric cum urbane pastoral. —A. E. Stallings (from the foreword), 2016 Able Muse Book Award judge Manhattanite gives us the Manhattan of speed chess players in the park, tipsy tipplers tipping off the rooftops, the night sky bright with city light, tenants, tenements and supers. Aaron Poochigian is the poet in New York seeking a holy aura in the song of gunshots and spiral sirens, picking like a grizzled pigeon through stray

newspapers, bottles, bags, and candy wrappers for a scrap of religion. Each poem is a tower growing out of our human filth and scraping the sky with sky-lines, and together they build a city of words. Put New York in your pocket. It's inside this book. —Tony Barnstone Reading Aaron Poochigian's Manhattanite is a dynamic, kinetic experience. These poems travel at a fast clip, pulling you along through cityscapes, wastelands, and other vistas. Some of the poems tunnel downward, plumbing depths of mood and memory. Whichever way they move, Poochigian's poems perform with such panache and brio that it's hard to know whether to laugh or cry. I'd say do both—and keep reading. But be warned: this isn't a feel-good book. It's a fearless book. —Rachel

Hadas Thoreau once boasted that he had traveled widely in Concord; Aaron Poochigian's title indicates that he has traveled widely elsewhere—in the one borough worth experiencing, through western deserts, aboard “an ultra-modern train/ lipping through French or German woods,” and in a Paris of naked bulbs and seedy cabarets. In all of these settings, he deftly choreographs his cast of nameless characters. The concluding lines of “Song: Go and Do It” claim, “I’ll still swear/ we could be happy anywhere.” One sure location of that “anywhere” exists between the covers of Manhattanite. —R. S. Gwynn

**Able Muse, Summer 2017 (No. 23 - print edition)** Able Muse Press

This is the seminannual Able Muse Review (Print Edition) - Winter 2015

issue, Number 20. This issue continues the tradition of masterfully crafted poetry, fiction, essays, art & photography, and book reviews that have become synonymous with the Able Muse—online and in print. After more than a decade of online publishing excellence, Able Muse print edition maintains the superlative standard of the work presented all these years in the online edition, and, the Able Muse Anthology (Able Muse Press, 2010). “. . . [ ABLE MUSE ] fills an important gap in understanding what is really happening in early twenty-first century American poetry.” - Dana Gioia. CONTENTS: WITH THE 2015 ABLE MUSE WRITE PRIZE FOR POETRY & FICTION — Includes the winning story and poems from the contest winners and finalists. EDITORIAL

— Alexander Pepple. FEATURED ARTIST — Léon Leijdekkers. FEATURED POET — Amit Majmudar; (Interviewed by Daniel Brown). FICTION — Paul Soto, Lynda Sexson, Andrea Witzke Slot. ESSAYS — N.S. Thompson, Moira Egan. BOOK REVIEWS — Stephen Kampa, Robert B. Shaw. POETRY — X.J. Kennedy, Wendy Videlock, Kim Bridgford, Peter Kline, Catharine Savage Brosman, Terese Coe, Steven Winn, Jay Udall, Beth Houston, Jennifer Reeser, Leslie Schultz, Ryan Wilson, Max Gutmann, Freeman Rogers, Dan Champion, Brooke Clark, David Stephenson, Autumn Newman, James Matthew Wilson, Athar C. Pavis, Jeanne Wagner, Elise Hempel.  
Able Muse Press  
In Sally Thomas's *Motherland*, the poet keenly observes the ephemeral and the

everlasting in the lens of time-the daily into seasonal transformations, the gifts and wonders of nature and people. *Motherland* by turns hails and interrogates in matters of flesh, of faith and spirituality-especially so in the "Richeldis of Walsingham" poem sequence. This finalist in the Able Muse Book Award is a collection abounding in insight, hope, grace, surprises, and yes, love. PRAISE FOR MOTHERLAND: A core of spiritual knowledge resides in the poems of Sally Thomas's *Motherland*-knowledge that might seem strange to the poet herself, in fact, though it definitely resides in her, and radiates throughout this collection. *Motherland* is the perfect title, since the poet, herself a mother, regards all her human occupations as native and yet

mysterious, occurring in a place which is both foreign and familiar. The final sequence, on Richeldis of Walsingham, includes lines that describe the expression of that knowledge, as “the eloquence/ Of the small river moving always forward to the unseen/ Sea.” Motherland is a book of the presence-radiant, benevolent, challenging-for which there is often no word, except as we find in poetry, like the poetry of Sally Thomas.” -Mark Jarman, author of *The Heronry* The poems of Sally Thomas are poems in which the act of looking at the world in all its depth and complexity is just about as close as possible to being fully realized in the corresponding “world” of poetic language and form. And the verses are compelling because in every line something is at stake: our

very understanding of creation, the human condition, and the mystery of thought and its language that link us, however imperfectly, to what may be called the given world. As Thomas says in “Frost,” “Tricky winter light and my own eye/ Bend the world, if not to beauty, then/ To strangeness.” -David Middleton (from the foreword), author of *The Fiddler of Driskill Hill* In her most recent collection of poems, *Motherland*, Sally Thomas gives us a world we live in but, alas, too often don’t seem to see. So much is lost, these poems tell us, even as they manage to reinstate and re-imagine these losses for us. All poetry is elegiac, even as it can, in the hands of a serious poet, celebrate the very world which for all of us keeps slipping away in the great wheel of time. Then too there

is her mastery of poetic form—among these the sonnet, the villanelle, the couplet, and her unparalleled command of rhyme and slant rhyme. What a delight to discover a poet who has found a way to allow the sacred and the sacramental inform her poems in a surprising range of contemporary idioms. —Paul Mariani, author of *Epitaphs for the Journey*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Sally Thomas was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1964, and was educated at Vanderbilt University, the University of Memphis, and the University of Utah. She spent some years living in the American West and in Great Britain before settling in North Carolina, her current home. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Fallen Water* (2015) and *Richeldis of Walsingham* (2016),

both from Finishing Line Press. Over the last two decades, her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Dappled Things*, *First Things*, *Relief: A Journal of Art and Faith*, *Southern Poetry Review*, the *New Yorker*, the *Rialto*, and other journals in the United States and Great Britain.

*Poems* Able Muse Press

*Carrie Shipers's Cause for Concern* traverses a landscape of assorted disasters—such as overwork and layoffs, the ill-fated explorer, circus mishaps, nuclear disaster and radiation—but at its heart is the personal disaster of spousal illness. While a spouse might avow faith in the sentiment of love in sickness and in health, the practice of such faith might come undone when faced with the reality of the ravages of illness on the stricken body of the beloved, alongside



the caregiving mate who “could love/  
[her] husband but distrust his body,/  
expect betrayal at every turn.” Full of  
incisive meditations on frailties and  
fortitude often delivered with visceral  
honesty, Cause for Concern is  
spellbinding from start to finish and,  
deservedly, the winner of the 2014 Able  
Muse Book Award for Poetry. PRAISE FOR  
CAUSE FOR CONCERN: Carrie Shipers’s  
magnificent endeavor aims to control  
the uncontrollable. In her splendid  
collection Cause for Concern she gives  
us her spirited poems—subversively  
satisfying in our era of cool wordplay.  
Both her comfort with ambiguity and her  
sassy candor aid the poet as she writes  
of a wife who is hoodwinked into a  
necessary patience—one she both  
chafes from and rebels against after her

husband falls seriously ill. In rhythms  
that alternate between hope and defeat,  
the poems track the illness, but also  
punctuate the couple’s changed world  
with quirky observations and a scrappy  
spirituality. (Not to mention a canine  
companion.) Her poet’s craft, palpable in  
every arresting line, makes the subtlest  
turns of vulnerability with enviable poise.  
—Molly Peacock, 2014 Able Muse Book  
Award judge, author of The Paper  
Garden Only a poet of unquestionable  
bravery and technical acuity could  
rehearse the quotidian details of a  
middle class, middle aged existence with  
such exquisite, irresistible and terrifying  
honesty. —Kwame Dawes, author of  
Duppy Conqueror: New and Selected  
Poems If illness is a country inhospitable  
to guests, then Carrie Shipers’s second

poetry collection, *Cause for Concern*, is our guidebook, preparing us for what we will find in the waiting room, by the bedside, in the bathroom, or on the skin when the gauze is lifted. These are naked, open poems. They say things that make us wince, as when we look at an incision still puckered and red.

*Shippers* reminds us that our lives must first be prodded and cauterized, if the injured parts are ever to heal. —Jehanne Dubrow, author of *The Arranged Marriage*

Able Muse Press

In *Second Rain*, Elise Hempel gleans anecdotes of uncommon poignancy from the seemingly commonplace, and crafts them into memorable poems. Family settings and the world of nature are captured and shaped into insight

through the poet's discerning eyes: here an only child in her room with a lone and captive katydid; here a feisty grandmother in the hospital; here a father fond of household projects, building two swimming pools, a basketball hoop in the driveway, and transforming the yard into a skating rink. This inspirational debut collection, charged with nostalgia and longing, is fittingly finalist in the 2015 Able Muse Book Award. **PRAISE FOR SECOND RAIN:** The apparently domestic poems in *Second Rain* (poems about family, gardening, dogs, birds, and a few memorable tigers) deliver enough controlled intensity "to shake the trees all down." A special gift of Elise Hempel's art is to evoke and suggest passions without spelling them out; we readers

get to unscramble the anagram, to find the ache—and our own corresponding ache—beneath the poised surface.

—Rachel Hadas, author of *Questions in the Vestibule* [Elise Hempel's] curiosity and insights singled her out as special, but her ability to shape her feelings into words remains what I find most unique . . . From the opening title poem on, this is a book about the often ignored, simple gifts that come to us, like "the second rain that comes/ when the first is over," that "gentle scattering of drops" the breeze shakes down from the trees and "briefly blesses you." —Bruce Guernsey (from the foreword), author of *From Rain: Poems, 1970–2010* From the title poem on, Elise Hempel's *Second Rain* matches form with feeling, delivering insights that seem at once inevitable

and necessary. Her sense of the sonnet—its grace and shape—lends quiet force to what's remembered and observed, from a pet shop crow to memories of now-absent loved ones, mother-daughter conflicts to the ambiguities of language itself. Like the flock of geese described in one poem here, Hempel's collection succeeds in many "different keys." —James Scruton, author of *Thrift Through* admirably controlled and marvelously controlling language, the compressed imagery in Elise Hempel's powerfully compact poems subtly evokes emotional responses, while the poet also smartly engages readers with an authentic and persuasive voice. Indeed, to borrow a phrase from the eighth and final line in the collection's title poem, each piece in

Second Rain “briefly blesses you.”  
 —Edward Byrne, author of Seeded Light  
**Times Square and Other Stories** Able  
 Muse Press  
 Dirge for an Imaginary World from  
 Matthew Buckley Smith is the winner of  
 the 2011 Able Muse Book Award,  
 selected by Andrew Hudgins. These are  
 poems of breathtaking craftsmanship  
 that find inspiration in the simplicity of  
 the quotidian, or the perplexity of the  
 grand. Smith is equally at ease musing  
 about Neanderthals or God as he is with  
 a ballet exam or highway medians.  
 These poems of personal and universal  
 introspection are filled with grace, and  
 sparkle with abundant intelligence and  
 wit. This masterful debut collection is an  
 event to celebrate. PRAISE FOR DIRGE  
 FOR AN IMAGINARY WORLD: Wildness

and precision and passion balanced with  
 wit—there are the hallmarks of Matthew  
 Buckley Smith’s superb Dirge for an  
 Imaginary World. In subjects great (“For  
 the Neanderthals”) and small made  
 great (“For the College Football  
 Mascots”), the comic is rich with serious  
 intent and gravity lightened with  
 discerning wit. But only a poet who lifts  
 heavy and unwieldy subjects—death,  
 lost love, the absence of god—knows the  
 imperatives of graceful balance. –  
 Andrew Hudgins (Judge, 2011 Able Muse  
 Book Award) In this deeply impressive  
 debut volume of poetry, Dirge for an  
 Imaginary World, Matthew Buckley Smith  
 delivers a remarkable range of deft  
 formal schemes, temporal movements,  
 and varied settings. We encounter  
 sonnets, couplets, quatrains, Sapphics,

sestets and so forth written with a slick, delightful merging of technical expertise and smooth contemporary rhythms. The range of subjects is equally and as charmingly eclectic, from Neanderthals, Dante, Vermeer, for instance, to College Football Mascots, Highway Mediums, and Spring Ballet Exams. Mental and linguistic agility generously challenge the reader in poem after poem. – Greg Williamson (from the “Foreword”) “If a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst,” wrote Thomas Hardy, whose spirit moves through the fine poems of Matthew Buckley Smith’s debut collection. Like his blast-beruffled predecessor, Smith braves a clear-eyed look at our fallen world, mourning in elegantly precise language the sorrows inherent in “set(ing) out to map a

promised land/ Out of reach and always just at hand,” but also wishing great mercy upon us travelers failed and failing. These are poems full of both reckoning and grace, made all the more beautiful for their humane wisdom. *Dirge for an Imaginary World* is immensely impressive. – Carrie Jerrell

**Animal Psalms - Poems** Able Muse Press

Susan de Sola’s *Frozen Charlotte* spans the breadth of human experience—from celebration to lamentation, from gravity to lightheartedness, from domestic and quotidian scenarios to historic upheavals and their aftermaths, both European and American. She skillfully deploys an impressive range of formal styles and free verse in her debut collection. De Sola’s *Frozen Charlotte* manifests all the hall-

marks of a seasoned poet in surefootedness, wit, and depth of empathy.

### **PRaise FOR FROZEN CHARLOTTE**

The breadth of Susan de Sola's poetry, by turns gossamer light and solemnly elegiac, offers a pleasurable aesthetic surprise from poem to poem—from "sun-starved Dutchmen" to immigrant Jews in Manhattan, from tulips to the life of a friend whose actual name she never knew, from the imagined language of rocks to a war widow's cedar closet, from the death of an infant to conjugal love. Susan de Sola evinces wit and knowingness, a dexterity with verse, a way with form. The pleasure of de Sola's poetry is to be in the presence of virtuosity and insight, of a poet who knows what it means to be human, and when to be serious and when to be light.

-Mark Jarman, author of *The Heronry*

When I read Susan de Sola's uncanny title poem "Frozen Charlotte" for the first time, I couldn't stop thinking about it. I feel the same about the book as a whole, a virtuoso grouping of form and topic, a book that is haunting, yet which also sparkles with a sense of humor that I much enjoyed. Susan de Sola, it seems, can write in any form. While this book is her first full-length collection, it is the work of a master craftsman.

-Kim Bridgford, author of *Undone*

Whether their subject is a painting by Sargent, a gathering at the site of a Holocaust deportation center, or the bestial appearance of ATM machines, Susan de Sola's poems seem animate with her vision: the poems breathe on the page. Part of de Sola's power lies in her formal

acumen. Every word here seems carefully sieved from the welter of English, and each poem's form is perfectly matched to its ambition and music. De Sola's tonal range is equally rich-she is by turns funny and dark, pensive and sly, her voice resounding in the reader's head long after a poem's final line. Like its memorable title poem, *Frozen Charlotte* intrigues, goes deep, surprises. It is a book rich with the pleasures the best poetry provides.

-Clare Rossini, author of *Lingo*

This book has many moods and many messages for any reader who pays the poems collected here the attention they deserve. At times it seems a fairground, at times a graveyard, and neither cancels the other out. It is a mark of Susan de Sola's always persuasive rhetoric that

we see that both characterizations are somehow, simultaneously, true, and that despite their exhilarating variety these poems are of a piece and come from one complex, sophisticated, supremely alert sensibility.

-Dick Davis (from the foreword), author of *Love in Another Language*

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Susan de Sola's poems have appeared in many venues, such as the *Hudson Review* and *PN Review*, and in anthologies, including *The Best American Poetry 2018*. She is a winner of the David Reid Poetry Translation Prize and the Frost Farm Prize. She holds a PhD in English from the Johns Hopkins University and has published essays and reviews as Susan de Sola Rodstein. Her photography is featured in the chapbook *Little Blue Man*.

A native New Yorker, she lives near Amsterdam with her family.

Poems by Elise Hempel Lulu.com

All the Wasted Beauty of the World, a finalist for the 2012 Able Muse Book Award, extols the beautiful as readily as it expounds on the blemished. The reasoned commingles with the rambunctious, as in the case of the speaker who declares that “our lives span diaper to diaper,/ and in between we piss on anyone/ we can.” Little escapes notice in these poems of gutsy realism and formal deftness, which freely highlight the fringes of society—the speaker in “Bellefontaine Cemetery” exhorts teens to “party on people’s graves” and have “a few close shaves with county sheriffs,” the carcass of a Ford truck intrudes on a hiking trail’s

gully, the homeless are lullabied to “find rest behind our dumpster/ . . . score a fifth of bourbon/ and find your stomach full.” Richard Newman brings us a collection that prods and soars with the grit and beauty of the real world. PRAISE FOR ALL THE WASTED BEAUTY OF THE WORLD: Richard Newman’s All the Wasted Beauty of the World is masterful and magnetic, from the “galaxy of gnats” hovering in the St. Louis twilight to the way a backwoods junkyard “gnaws on a pile of old Ford bones.” He sees a group of bored high school kids with “nothing to lose/ but stupid summer jobs and innocence,” and captures with perfect acuity how “September rain in streetlight/ silvers the cypress needles, scatters new dimes/ among the nuisance alley mulberry trees.” Newman’s poems,



with their formal, lapidary precision, their indelible portraits of life in the cheap bars, back alleys, and rough-hewn edges of the Midwest, surprise a hunger in us for a language larger, wilder, and unabashedly loftier than daily speech. - George Bilgere, author of *Imperial* The poems in Richard Newman's remarkable third collection, *All the Wasted Beauty of the World*, are heady explorers. They roam from Lost Man Pass to Benton Park, from downtown St. Louis to Southern Indiana, all the while balancing gorgeous musicality with lyric originality. In the midst of the wandering, there is longing in these poems-for place, for order, for morning. There is urgency, too, and beauty, wasted and otherwise, in places we don't always expect it. Newman is a bold and masterful formalist in a free-

verse world, and he uses sonnets, aubades, villanelles, and odes to reconcile the geographies of the interior and exterior. Again and again, this collection makes us recalibrate our true north and forces us to reconsider the world for all of the unpredictable places where we can find beauty. -Adrian Matejka, author of *The Big Smoke* Newman uses the power of recollection and imagery to craft odes, sonnets, villanelles, ballads, and free verse with titles like "Four Kids Pissing off the Overpass after a Cardinals Game." Each poem calls our attention to a rough-and-tumble, everyday America we often drive past but overlook. *All the Wasted Beauty of the World* returns us to the real and, consequently, the new by putting on the brakes and asking us to

look, if only briefly, beyond our rear-views. -Dorianne Laux, author of *The Book of Men*

**The Blind Loon - A Bestiary** Able Muse Press

Rebecca Starks's *Time Is Always Now* unfolds against a backdrop of nature, often permeated in unexpected ways with the human dynamics of family, neighborhood, and nation. Her poems convey the urgency within moments of transformation—whether seasonal, as in wilderness and garden; physical, as in the trajectory of youth, aging, and death; or political, as in the challenges of misgovernance and the environmental exigencies of our time. This finalist in the Able Muse Book Award is a finely wrought, thought-provoking collection.

**PRAISE FOR TIME IS ALWAYS NOW**

Drawing from sources as wide-ranging as Emily Dickinson, *Apocalypse Now*, fairy tales, and social media, Rebecca Starks's *Time Is Always Now* deftly balances intelligence and pathos, resisting easy dichotomies and judgments. As these fine poems insist, the present is relentless, and we are immersed: "No, not out of time; helplessly in it." Ours is a country of guns; ours is a "middle-aged earth" in decline—and yet, we are here, witnessing, questioning. I am grateful for Starks's voice in the present moment, and I'm grateful to have her poems to carry with me into the future, whatever it may bring.

—Maggie Smith, author of *Good Bones*

Rebecca Starks writes with a sense that time can be stopped in a poem, lives sus-

pended and drawn inward, even in the most aimless moments. There's a wonderful clarity to *Time Is Always Now*, an electricity that feels bright and wild. It's to be found in the roadsides and a robin's "clutch," in the retina that "registers pain," in the sky at dusk and the "months of mud." I greet these poems with so much enthusiasm—these poems that crave, clarify, and propose sublime ways to become refreshed in our most confused times.

—David Biespiel (from the foreword), author of *Republic Café*

At one point, Rebecca Starks describes a winter hike, in which she crosses "social mouse hops, two feet together" and passes "a squirrel's scramble at the base of a tree,/ then the bunched landings of a mustelid bound/ from the yawn under

one log to another." Several of her wonderful book's qualities are evidenced here. If too many poets, in their ignorance, regard nature as a mere repository of metaphor, Starks, like Frost, is both knowledgeable and uncannily *accurate* about it. ("Yawn" is the perfect word, say, in this passage.) Her sinuous and heavily subordinated syntax is also suggestive of a mind with great range—geographical, thematic, and prosodic—though she can also, as, for instance, in "American Flag," move by a cunning terseness.

—Sydney Lea, author of *The Music of What Happens: Lyric and Everyday Life*

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Rebecca Starks grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, earned a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in English from

Stanford University, and works as a freelance editor and as a teacher for the Osher Institute of Lifelong Learning program at the University of Vermont. Her poems and short fiction have appeared in *Baltimore Review*, *Ocean State Review*, *Slice Literary*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, and elsewhere. Winner

of *Rattle's* 2018 Neil Postman Award for Metaphor and past winner of *Poetry Northwest's* Richard Hugo Prize, she is the founding editor-in-chief of *Mud Season Review* and a former director of the Burlington Writers Workshop. She and her family live in a log cabin in the woods of Richmond, Vermont.

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