Death of a New Formalist

Matthew Nies

Have I been or will I be
A slave to a new formality

In poetry? West Chester’s embrace
Of its Ariel Dawson name

Defies a caustic label,
And I would join with “counter-culture” rebels

In a righteous cause—
Say to raise again poetry’s
Societal estimation—was
Not the cause’s self-titled nobility

In league with white
Nationalists, whose wretched beliefs
Of loathsome hate blight
Society. I also cleave

Association with New Formalism
For the too common shoddy work
Buttressing its base—old rhythms
Recycled with clichés and quirks

Reminiscent of old romantics. Semantic standing
Of a movement, self-styled or recognized, can be weaponized
By skillful critical hands, and where I stand
Can shift as sand and beyond my command
If I hitch to a plow. But I must hitch. Where now
To turn—spurn rhyme and forms,
Like couplets or quatrains, for untamed
Roaming words, perhaps to build foaming
Clouds with violent pulsing veins of electric reins
Guiding furious gallop to storm? Warning

Cautions care because, while I know
Only some research-worth about these
Who—while still unorganized—Wilson and Epstein hinted would have poverty
In language, it’s not wise to make enemies
When you don’t have many friends. Those I know better,
And their forms
Fill the leaves of every notable tree and
Sing without restraint. Were active unfettered
Worder’s words as beautiful to my ears as those standard bearer’s—whips
Lashing air, symphonic in cracks and whispers
Till cutting the vein to pour out
Dredged emotions, evocative and
Raw and unfiltered earth and sludge,
Leaving a mess critics only can sort through—I wouldn’t harbor such
Strong thoughts of traditional poetry.
This siren call serves as much to
Rebut those safely anchored in popular esteem—
More, those who esteem—
As it does to beckon triremes and sloops
Searching for safe destination:

I will not be defined as undefined or a new-old poet captive to form.
I will write poems I will enjoy reading—
Often forge-poured, anvil-hammered, stone-sharpened
In metered verse formed by traditional pressures,
But certainly not always.
Melancholy may tree shake and gain me a perch among the leaves—
So too revolutionary recklessness
To push, no matter cost, language.
What I do with words will only be done by me,
No matter their value,
No matter how I write or why,
And certainly not as a New Formalist.