

A.E. Stallings is a classicist, and would be if she never used a Greek or Roman reference. Intelligence, balance, an unerring sense of which form will further the material: these are classicism's characteristics, and hers. She makes you realize how much poetry is simply a mess. In some cases a striking and imaginative mess; still...

One hates to think what Sylvia Plath would have done with the situation in "Last Will."
A father in the NRA?

What he *really* wanted, she confesses,:
Was to be funneled into shells, and shot
Across a dove-field. Only she could not--

The kick of shotguns knocks her over. Well,
I say, he'd understand. It doesn't matter
What becomes of atoms, how they scatter.

The priest reads the committal, something short.
We drop the little velvet pouch of dust
Down a cylindrical hole bored in the clay--

And one by one, the doves descend, ash-gray,
Softly as condensation on the parking lot.
And silence sounds its deafening report.
--"Last Will"

I could point out such classic devices as *in medias res* and oxymoron, but will let you search them out yourself. My point is that she can be absolutely contemporary and recognizably classicist at the same time.

Stallings does not shy away from her heritage. Persephone appears more than once. I have to say I find her one of the drearier figures, along with Dido and Ariadne (even with the aid of Richard Strauss), but the poet makes a good case for her.

The place he took me to:
a. was dark as my shut eyes
b. and where I ate bitter seed and became ripe
c. and from which my mother would never take me wholly
back, though she wept and walked the earth and made
the bearded ears of barley wither on their stalks and the
blasted flowers drop from their sepals
d. is called by some men hell and others love
--"First Love: A Quiz"