



# CONTEMPORARY SONNET

Number 2

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## Contents

*JAMES S. WILK*

Winterizing 5

*JANICE D. SODERLING*

The Abandoned Wife's Sonnet 5

*RICK MULLIN*

The Dutchman 7

*J. PATRICK LEWIS*

Too Far From Fortune 8

Battle of Chosin 9

*GAIL WHITE*

The Muse Talks to the Poets 10

*T.S. KERRIGAN*

Rilke's Death 11

Happily Ever After 12

*SALLY COOK*

Battle Of The Sexes Revisited 13

As It Is Bent 14

*DAVID LANDRUM*

The Girl Who Knew Djuna Barnes 15

Julia's Breasts 16

*ALFRED DORN*

Deep Ones Are Best 17

Forest After Rain 18



## Winterizing

“Perhaps you two should get some counseling,” was Mom’s advice, “some family therapy might help.” The snow-bent branches of the tree scratched at the window. Connor’s tire swing hung still, a lusterless, inert half-ring consumed by snow. “Don’t take him back. Re-key the locks,” my father spat. “Tell him I’ll see his ass in court. That wasn’t just a fling.”

I stare outside and contemplate the squawk made by a hundred dusky skeins of geese leaving the frigid northern hemisphere for warmer climes. I start a fire. I caulk the drafty bedroom windows, seal and grease the doors, and hope that spring will come next year.

*Janice D. Soderling*

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## **The Abandoned Wife's Sonnet**

My face, relentless as the haunting moon,  
will taunt their troubled sleep. My hands, my hair  
will share the bed they lie in. Yes, I mean  
to slip between my husband and his whore.  
Each hour he turns his hungry lips to her,  
I will be there to meet his mouth with mine  
and when she cries his name, what he will hear  
will be my voice; her moan will be my moan.  
Her joy will wither and his passion shrink.  
All tricks are fair when love and war we wage.  
I've never been the sort to turn the cheek.  
Not weak, I am a woman who will watch,  
will launch my scheme as cunning as a shark  
and cackle loud when those two call me witch.

## The Dutchman

The moonlight feathers through a cypress tree,  
the classic column rooted in the night,  
his signature beyond the apogee  
of Mistral stars.

Beguiled by the sight  
of ravens, he pulled everything inside  
and lit it all incessantly. He made  
us feel his vertigo, the way he died.  
In doing so, he showed us how he prayed,

how casting off accomplishment, obsessed  
with the Ideal, and overwhelmed by God  
in everything, he nervously assessed  
the neighbors who pulled sustenance from sod.

How, laboring, he managed to anneal  
their swollen knuckles at the evening meal.

## Too Far From Fortune

Somewhere too far from fortune, here I am.  
The snowfall steals the sky, assaults the town,  
Disfigures everything like a hologram,  
And buries a highway marker upside down.  
Despite the cold-insinuating pain,  
I stand here, cataleptic, in the near dark,  
Marveling at winter's legerdemain,  
And watch the snowflakes filigree the park.  
But you are half a continent away  
Probably reading Proust and drinking wine—  
Or making love. Darling, what can I say  
To you who once was true and once was mine  
And now enjoys a pointless guessing game  
Of coyly misremembering my name?

*J. Patrick Lewis*

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## **Battle of Chosin**

*November 26-December 19, 1950*

*Korea*

No soldier can forget a distant planet,  
So cold a crater cold itself went numb.  
The mind of a Marine, a will of granite  
Could not unmask the misery to come.  
The Chinese army swept us like a wave!  
Surrounded and outnumbered five to one,  
We spit fear in the eye. A frozen grave—  
The end of our undoing—was undone.

Facing the senseless casualties of war,  
Commander Chesty Puller, 1st Marines,  
Retook the 7th Infantry's machines.  
We broke out of the Chosin reservoir,  
Bearing the brutal lesson of those hills:  
What hope does not abandon, winter kills.

## The Muse Talks to the Poets

I said to Homer: These guys want to hear  
Some guy talk. Emphasize the blood and guts—  
Eye-gouging by a wounded charioteer,  
Achilles dragging Hector through the dust.

I said to Dante: Hear those troubadours?  
The love of Woman is the latest thing.  
Go them one better. Earthly passion soars  
To Paradise when poets give it wing.

I said to Pope: You know that line that goes  
De-dum de-dum de-dum de-dum de-DUM?  
Put it in couplets. Line up endless rows.  
Trust me, it's an idea whose time has come.

I'm still the sea that holds the pearl you need.  
Dive deep, and bring me poems I can read.

## Rilke's Death

Milton died of blind ambition,  
Robert Burns of heart disease,  
Byron of a Greek condition,  
Keats of Scotch conspiracies,  
Wordsworth fell to inanition,  
Shelley drowned in stormy seas,  
Swinburne with no inhibition,  
Wilde was killed by court decrees,  
Hardy in morose reflection,  
Dylan by his "revelries."  
Rilke's end exceeded those,  
Showing beauty's blacker side;  
Reaching out to touch a rose,  
Pricked by thorns, he sickened, died.

## **Happily Ever After**

The old inconsequence of age: denied  
My proper place and voice these latter days.  
Who once received the unremitting praise  
Of greater men, by lesser men decried.  
My fortune nearly gone, and all my joy  
I thought my deeds, performed in brighter days,  
Would like a beacon, keep my fame ablaze.  
I've seen the reputations men destroy .  
Some cunning politicians now contend  
I plundered Heaven, brought the wrath of God,  
And some deny there ever was a stalk.  
My pockets bare, without a bean to spend,  
I drag another cow to fairs. How odd  
To be so poor, so full of rambling talk.

## **Battle Of The Sexes Revisited**

Rude, raucous boys threw my books from the bus  
When I was young. My mother made me go  
Walking the route the bus had taken us  
To reach my house. I cried, and made a fuss.

My papers blew across a sodden field,  
A deep and muddy ditch spit up my books  
And I bent to the power all mothers wield,  
No longer challenged adolescent looks.

Today an unknown rash or some malaise  
Would keep me from such adolescent trysts.  
The boys would lose their college funds, and craze.  
We'd meet again at the psychiatrist's.

Harrassment suits eventually would be filed,  
Scholarship money for the victim child.

## **As It Is Bent**

So cold, so hard, you own all you survey—  
At least you think you do, though I recall  
The times we dreamed of, some far, future day  
When we'd be older. In the drafty hall  
The Virgin Mary watched, we'd see her face;  
Madonna of the Chair was present where  
We made our dash across that frigid space  
With stones hot from the coal stove squatting there  
In the square dining room, where we had studied;  
Wrapped up in newsprint they would warm each bed.  
I think of careless clumsy boots, flung, muddied,  
And of the simple, even lives we led.  
I wonder where that child in glasses went,  
And how the twig grew twisted, old, and bent.

## **The Girl Who Knew Djuna Barnes**

I loved a woman who said she had known Djuna Barnes—knew her in childhood days. She and her mother went, when school was done, to a flat in Greenwich Village, Patchin Place, one day a week to talk with her. I think two ways on this: her mom was lesbian, perhaps—a lover; this could be the link between them—maybe she was just a fan and admired her writing. They would sit and chat, my friend said, while she made up games to play, read books, did puzzles, hummed, petted the cat, not hearing much the two women would say. She never heard me either. Soon I'd be like them, a thing filed in her memory.

## **Julia's Breasts**

On each of Julia's boobs peeped a *niplet*—  
and kudos for originality!  
For this coinage, this hapax, Herrick gets  
my praises. Place this terminology  
alongside wistful bagpipes, heavy grapes.  
To him, her tits were strawberries and cream—  
those rosebud-decorated sought-for shapes  
men love to love and love to the extreme.  
He asks her in one poem to display  
those twins, unlace herself so he can know  
the Via Lactea (the Milky Way),  
the soft, white path of stars the heavens show.  
His Julia's breasts: supreme divinity,  
warm scriptures, soft and mild theology.

## **Deep Ones Are Best**

My clothing harbors secret rooms I use  
to squirrel away the world, furnish a life  
too avid: the precautionary knife  
bad streets require, the keys I must not lose  
(or I will learn one's castle can refuse  
its owner), candy wrapped in handkerchief  
to palliate the unsweet tooth of grief,  
mail not yet read, with its uncontrollable news.

Endowed with a fastidious proboscis,  
I'm rescued by my cruet of cologne  
when the whole universe breathes halitosis.  
Give up my pockets?

Yes, when all I own  
vanishes in the ultimate narcosis,  
when clothes and skin no longer flatter bone.

## Forest After Rain

In this vague dawn that holds less light than shade,  
I half sleepwalk in wet up to the ankle  
here in these Catskill woods where Rip Van Winkle  
stumbled upon white-bearded elves that played  
at nine-pins in a secret mountain glade.  
Here grow the dogtooth violets Rip saw twinkle,  
and Dutchman's-breeches a hard rain might crinkle  
but not unravel, among which he'd strayed.

Mists of bright darkness (or dark light?) that float  
around me seem inhabited by powers  
watching this alien with invisible eyes.  
Should elf with sugar-loaf hat and beard of goat  
beckon me from a hammock spun of flowers,  
I'd wave back cordially, without surprise.



## Notes

**Sally Cook** is both painter and poet. Her poetry has been published in *Chronicles*, *The New Formalist*, and *The Barefoot Muse*. Presently, an E-book of her poems can be seen on the website of *The New Formalist*.

**Alfred Dorn** began writing poetry at age ten after reading James Russell Lowell's "Aladdin." A prolific, widely published writer of metrical verse, he is the author of *Voices From Rooms*, and *From Cells To Mindspace*.

**T.S. Kerrigan** lives in Los Angeles, California, USA. His work has been published in many magazines and anthologies in America and Europe.

**David W. Landrum** has published poetry in many magazines and journals, including *The Chimaera*, *Hellas*, *The Formalist*, and many others. He is editor of *Lucid Rhythms*.

**J. Patrick Lewis'** poems have been published in *Gettysburgh Review*, *Kansas Quarterly* and *Sycamore Review* and many more.

**Rick Mullin** is a business journalist and painter whose poetry has appeared in several print and online journals including *The Chimaera*, *The New Formalist*, and *Umbrella*. He lives in northern New Jersey.

**Janice D. Soderling** is winner of a Glimmer Train Short Fiction Competition 2006, and finalist in a Glimmer Train "Family Matters" competition 2007. Her work may be accessed at *Innisfree*, *The Barefoot Muse*, and *The Chimaera*.

**James S. Wilk's** poems have recently appeared in *The Lyric*, *Measure*, *The Pharos* and *The Panhandler Quarterly*.

**Gail White's** latest chapbook is *Ignoble Truths* from Scienter Press. She lives in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, where she studies the psychology of her cats, Pushkin and Muffin.



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