

CONTEMPORARY SONNET

Number 3



Michelle Dale
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Tom Riley

Day of Rest

Sir, on the day you rested, we enjoyed
Your absence—as perhaps you’d always planned.
We sinned—and you seemed not at all annoyed.
We listened—but you issued no demand.
Your subtlety we failed to understand.
Your cleverness we failed to keep in mind.
We never guessed your power would expand
As you snuck up from inside and behind.
Now you are here—and angels stand aligned
To serve the close precision of your wrath.
We recognize that we are in a bind.
We wish you hadn’t led us down this path.
Sir, our unhappy state shows much amiss.
Get to work: build a nicer world than this!

David Landrum

Odysseus Comes to Ogygia

He followed a fixed star: Polaris, hub
of constellations, stake set in the sky,
continuing his broken voyage toward love
some thirteen years after that last good-bye,
his last kiss from Penelope, last glimpse
of Ithaca and his son Telemakos.

He clung to wreckage after the eclipse
of Zeus's favor; drifted days across
the cold fish-breeding sea, then made landfall
not on his Ithaca but on the realm
Kalypso governed with her siren-call.
She made his guiding hand desert the helm—
long years held on an island in the sea
learning love's pleasure and love's misery.

David Landrum

Archimedes

The king stood by. The old man turned the crank.
Gears clicked, the ship began cutting a groove
in the sand, its forward motion even, smooth,
past courtiers and soldiers rank on rank,
toward the brackish water; finally, its prow sank
then floated upward—his task to prove
that if he had a place to stand he'd move
the world. The skeptics there, who did not think
it possible a doddering old hulk,
bent over, squinting in the summer sun,
could make this kind of boast then get it done
witnessed his corky arms move that great bulk,
a ship laden with cargo, to the sea
through strength of mind, and with machinery.

David J. Rothman

The Demon Opens an Auction

Sweetheart, if it walks upon the earth,
Swims in the ocean or flies through the air,
It's for sale. No matter what it's worth,
Say, human life, yes, it's for sale somewhere.
And more—air, ocean, earth, you betcha, can
Be yours for a price, are on this auction block,
Along with rights to do the things that man
Can do to them, down to the dark bedrock.
And why stop there? We market time, shares, debt,
Options, futures, war, philosophy.
We bet on things that don't exist as yet,
Then hedge, like a subjunctive prophecy.
Yes darling, all the poems are for sale.
Now—How much for the tongue of a nightingale?

Joseph S. Salemi

The Seducer Comes Clean

Alright, I may as well admit the truth:
I want you as a stallion wants a mare.
Does this confession seem a bit uncouth?
Perhaps it is, with impudence to spare.

Hypocrisy, imposture, and deceit
Drape gauzy veils on passions we both know—
You can't call me a liar or a cheat
When all I offer is desire's glow.

I won't write love notes or present a ring
To gain your brief companionship in flesh.
There is no baited mousetrap set to spring—
Just the suggestion that we gently mesh

Our two selves in that warm and wordless tangle
For which (in your case) I won't grossly angle.

Joseph S. Salemi

The Lady Replies in Kind

Your manners are beyond belief. Did I
Give you the cue for such appalling cheek?
You dared imagine that I would comply
With brazen rudeness, void of all technique?

I'll set you straight—a man's transparent schemes
Are obvious to women with their wits.
You think we are bamboozled? In your dreams!
If males were not such crass, conceited twits

They'd know a woman never grants her favors
Because of some man's infantile deception.
We know your lies come in all shapes and flavors
Though here's a rule that goes without exception:

It stings her pride, and wounds a lady's heart
When tempters forswear camouflage and art.

James Kirk

My Grandfather's Garage, circa 1968

In one deep breath it smelled of horse manure
and Quaker Motor Oil, of harness reins
and rusty license plates, of this century
and the last; smelled of kerosene lanterns
and leather coal buckets, of udder ointment
unused in fifty years; of pitted ax-heads
split from their helves; smelled of coonshit
and mouse nests, and old block planes cured
with the salt of human sweat; of cast iron
augurs and adzes, lengths of uncut cypress—
things for slow hewing and things to be hewn;
the aroma of a failed farm, a tractor out of gas,
redolence of the garden in the gardener's glove—
the odor of gone and the stench of love.

E. Shaun Russell

Disillusion

We're taught as children that the world is fair—
That following our dreams will make them true
So long as we maintain to follow through
And nurture them, despite life's wear and tear;
We live the lie and battle through despair
When circumstances knock our dreams askew—
Tenaciously, we rally and pursue
Elusive castles in illusive air.
But visions of the future rarely last:
Beyond a certain age they seem obscene,
Like childhood galleons dashed upon the rocks;
When finding all your hopes have long since passed,
It's then that you will see your life has been
A paradise within a paradox.

Peter Austin

Medusa

They knew she'd set at naught Jehovah's plan
That people should be black or white, not mixed,
But what, precisely, branded her betwixt?
Her skin tone could be taken for a tan;
Her lips were thin; her nose was à la grecque;
Her hair, though.... In a wink, her classmates knew:
Among those inky serpents lay the clue
That writhed about her head and down her neck.

“Medusa!” someone cried. On cue, they froze,
Limbs paroxysmal, rictal-mouthed, bug-eyed,
By a barbaric beauty petrified,
Till chuckles, efflorescing, wrecked their pose....
Later that night, with neither writhe nor sound,
The scissored snakes glissaded to the ground.

Scott Wiggerman

My Generation

We knew not what we had to prove each night,
laid back in raw tumescent reveries
when fate could take us anywhere. The fight
was there, the drive to make a mark, to seize
the world and grab it by the balls—at least
it started out that way. The world fought back,
attacked and maimed illusions. Dreams decreased,
ambitions took a hit, and hopes turned black
as oil. We lost too much: the need to prove
ourselves, the chance for better lives, the quest
for health and joy and peace, the whole damned groove
of hippied youth. We failed the acid test.
A parody for generations, we
have shown the jaded world how not to be.

Scott Wiggerman

Lessons to Learn

A hand extends. Another hand, like leaf
to sun, ascends, accepts, and fingers clasp
for warmth against the cold. But like a thief,
one slips away as cars approach, the grasp
dissolved before the yell of *faggot* wrecks
the walk. A hand, another hand, that's all:
no look, no kiss, no hint of any sex.

The public touch of man to man, though small,
is never innocent to those who feel
a threat of impudence. So curses spew
and fists come out—worse, a glint of steel.
A bloodied couple learns to fear anew,
to stash their hands in pockets deep, to shove
into the dark those signs of outward love.

Sally Cook

MRI

In a grey room with dull reflections sits
The thing which measures secrets of the skull.
It follows every inner turning, it's
Machine-intrusive, yet removed and dull.

Whatever else those probing rays define,
The bitter taste of memory falls flat
Before the force that searches out the line
Of hurt that throws me quickly to the mat.

And every little detail that is culled
Is fed upon with relish, stirs my fears.
Supine and passive, I can feel I'm pulled
As if a tooth were yanked, and the arrears
Of not perusing every niche and space
Of life insures I'll go without a trace.

Enriqueta Carrington

Zebra Swallowtail

He, speared and splayed on a collector's pin,
we, deaf to chants of fish and butterflies,
passions of sparrows, loves of damselflies,
all but the highest notes a whale may sing,

blind to comedies in the robin's nest,
ultraviolet patterns on a white fin,
the seeming blank of corolla or catkin,
infrared figures on the blackbird's breast,

we see him speared, and by the quivering
of his zebra wing, those spots of scarlet,
those jots of blue, can tell he's living yet,
and know one more specimen is nothing.

From our path the squirrel moves at leisure
as one who knows there's lots of time to spare.

Stephen S. Power

Last Night

Come noon, alone, he found the strength to loose
himself from knots of sheets. His mouth was gagged
with bruises from her lips. His shoulders sagged,
too scored and sore to lift. His neck felt noosed.
He surveyed all the damage to their room.
The lamps were smashed, the shelves and chair collapsed,
the sofa stained and torn, their mirror cracked.
Is this what love finally must come to?

After a time he found her in the tub.
He knelt beside her, took a cloth and traced
the marks on her back. She shivered at his touch.
She said, "Is no new pleasure left for us?
Could we know more than that?" He firmly placed
his thumbs on her neck. It would, he thought, be rough.

Notes

Peter Austin lives with his wife and three daughters in Toronto, Canada, where he teaches English at Seneca College. Over ninety of his poems have been published, in magazines and anthologies in the USA, Canada, the UK and several other countries. As well as poetry, he writes plays, and his musical adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows* has enjoyed four productions, the most recent in July '07, in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Sally Cook lives a reclusive country life with her husband, political cartoonist Bob Fisk, and cats. She is both painter and poet. She has been the recipient of several scholarships and awards. Cook keeps a sharp eye out for the psychological portrait in both disciplines.

Enriqueta Carrington's poetry in English and Spanish, and her poetry translations, have appeared in *Umbrella Journal*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *A Gathering of the Tribes* and other journals. She teaches mathematics at Rutgers University.

James Kirk's poetry has been widely though sporadically published for the last 25 years. He has yet to bring out a full length book. He lives, works, teaches and writes, with much difficulty, in a small tidewater town just outside of Atlantic City, NJ. He is the co-editor of *Golden Light: The 1878 Diary of Captain Thomas Rose Lake*. He has work online forthcoming from *Cortland Review* this summer.

David W. Landrum is professor of Humanities at Cornerstone University, Grand Rapids, Michigan. His poetry and short stories have been published in *The Barefoot Muse*, *Measure*, *The New Formalist*, and many other magazines and journals. He edits the on-line poetry journal, *Lucid Rhythms*.

Stephen S. Power's work has appeared most recently in *Deronda*, *Descant*, *Exit 13*, *Free Lunch* and *Raintown Review*. He is a senior editor at John Wiley & Sons, where he handles history, music, science and sports books.

David J. Rothman has new poetry forthcoming in *The Hudson Review*, *The Journal*, *Light*, *Tar River Poetry* and others. A long scholarly essay on Robinson Jeffers and translation of narrative poetry is forthcoming in *Jeffers Studies*, another on Anthony Hecht's versecraft is forthcoming in a book from *Contemporary Poetry Review* and a third on Stanley Fish is forthcoming in *Academic Questions*.

Tom Riley was born in 1958 and grew up in Western New York. He was educated at Hartwick College and at the University of Notre Dame. He teaches English literature and Classical languages in Napa, California, where he lives with his wife, Mary, a stepdaughter, three small children, his in-laws, and a timid Belgian shepherd. He drinks lots of red wine, and has published more poems in the last twenty-nine years than he cares to keep track of.

E. Shaun Russell is a formalist poet and musician based out of Vancouver, Canada. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous publications, including *The PEN*, *Inverted-A Horn* and *Lucid Rhythms*.

Joseph S. Salemi teaches in the Department of Humanities at New York University, and in the Classics Department of both Hunter College and Brooklyn College, C.U.N.Y. His work has appeared in over one hundred journals and literary magazines in the United States and in Britain.

Scott Wiggerman's publications include poems in *Gertrude*, *Windbover*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Spillway*, *Poesia*, and *Visions International*, as well as the anthologies *This New Breed: Gents, Bad Boys, and Barbarians 2 (Windstorm Creative)* and *Only Connect (Cinnamon Press)*. In addition, he is one of the two "cats" (i.e., editors) of Dos Gatos Press, which publishes the *Texas Poetry Calendar*, now in its eleventh year.



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