CONTEMPORARY SONNET

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Tamara de Lempicka
Tamara in a Green Bugatti(1929)

Contents

Joseph S. Salemi

One Alumnus

for Lieutenant Bernard A. Kroll
3rd Armored "Spearhead" Division, U.S. Army
Died of wounds, January 22, 1945

The school has a glass case, within displayed
Your V-mail, college ring, division patch,
A small initialled lighter, and a batch
Of letters to your brother, edges frayed.
A mint-new, spit-and-polish young lieutenant
Stares from your glossy photo. Left and right
A Bronze Star and a Purple Heart shine bright
Above a torn and faded Spearhead pennant.

A later snapshot shows you on a jeep:
A somewhat tougher soldier in full kit.
Just when the Bulge collapses, you are hit—
You linger for six days in morbid sleep
Until all's finished. Then your family gets
This silent yellow telegram's regrets.

Anna Stiritz

Mark Hester's House Burns Down Again

Once when he was drunk he tossed his shirt
across the stove and caught the flannel cuff
against the wire element, enough
to char the cotton. Nobody got hurt.
Once he let a butt fall down and smolder
under the recliner, quickening.
He woke up when the room was thickening,
and didn't think he'd live to get much older.
All his dark forebodings would prove true.
He'd end in fire, like he always knew:
He'd feel a dizzy weakness in the legs
just like the choking drawn-out way the dregs
of whiskey burn the throat. There'd be a glow,
then a slow loss of will, and letting go.

Jennifer Reeser

With Admiring Eyes He Met Me

He met me with upraised, admiring eyes
As I descended towards the dining place,
When I was taken wholly by surprise,
So loving was the look upon his face;
So worshipful, so open and so long,
It caused an atrial flutter, a mild stir
Inside the four chambers. *What*, I thought, *was wrong?*
Foolish, adoring girl—*he'd been with her.*
And in a matter of moments, it would stop
Completely, that sweet heart, for good, that night,
As though for an exasperated cop
Directing traffic at a broken light;
Yet thrilled as never before—that final flash
The second when one meets the head-on crash.

Cheyenne Willow Dance

A length of bark bejeweled with little leaves
Of bough sliced from the graceful willow tree
Is ribboned into strips of arbor sleeves,
To make a headdress and a sash for me.

I stand undaunted—stoic, still and stern.
Medicine power rests within these swatches.
So buffalo will hear him, and return,
The shaman sings this Willow Song, and watches.

The day shines brighter than the white man's gold.
"This brave is gladdened. His beloved one
Upon him casts her lovely eye. Behold!"
He's singing, in the Dances of the Sun,
From words old warrior, Good Bear, learned, when younger,
So that our people would not die of hunger.

It Took the Tribe

It took the tribe to get me over you—
Day after day, each truthful, trickling voice
On my arising, till what I could do
Or dream for them grew strong, and you, the choice
Weaker and worse to my awakened mind.
When you proved pettier than dense profusions
Of seed within a watermelon rind
From which my people drew their wise conclusions
Or witty parallels, the passion passed.
The pregnant squaw took precedence, the boy
At ball play, and the gathering of bast
To palliate their restfulness and joy
When stepping onto that tribunal floor
Where you and love aren't chieftains anymore.

Leo Yankevich

Sonnet For All Who Follow Me

Crows and leaves beyond the windowpane,
a cup of steaming coffee on the stool,
my lines reflected in your eyes, which strain
in light as mine once did, the feel of wool
that keeps our stomachs, chests, and shoulders warm
unite us, you now, I who came before.
You wonder how I lived, and ask what harm
beset my age? Floods, earthquakes, famine, war.
Pain transcends the centuries is all
that I can say in speech that has no tenses.
My words part oaks and fly beyond a wall.
They are lamplight reflected in our lenses,
the taste of coffee, cawing in the fall,
the language of the five immortal senses.

Moonshine, 1969

Grandpa had a gambler's poker face,
though grandma held the tattered deck of cards.
We crossed the bridge in Wheatland, and then raced
by Dunbar Slag, and two scrap metal yards.
Old Bill was sleeping near his pit-bull Pug,
but woke when he caught ear of grandpa's voice.
They went inside, then came out with a jug
of what Old Bill called "Pennsylvania's Choice."
They drank it like spring water, cold and pure,
reminisced about what two old fogies
had done for cash in nineteen-twentyfour,
then grandpa smiled and said: "We'd better go."
Before we got back home he smoked two stogies,
stinky ones, so grandma wouldn't know.

John Whitworth

Gun Law

Last Tuesday week I shot my mother dead.
I pondered it for weeks and then I did it.
I planted several bullets in her head.
The thing was hellish messy so I hid it;
A freezer hummed convenient in the basement.
She sang out smugly from the frozen peas,
You killed your mother and there's no replacement.
Stern measures are required in times like these
So yesterday I took the bus to school
And shot a bunch of kids I didn't care for,
And shot my teacher too, the bloody fool,
Because I couldn't think what they were there for,
And shot the parson through his holy eyeball,
And burned his church and shat upon his bible.

Sally Cook

Gentrification

The flagstone walk remains strong and embedded
But all the dandelions have been beheaded;
Though you can still get eggplant that's been breaded
Around the corner at a little bar.
It's not the ambiance that rearranged
Or that the residents became estranged,
But rather that the people were exchanged
For graduates of Lit Class and the Bar.

For those requiring blandness and safe places
Disdained those lumpy lower-middle faces
Once seen in what are now prime rental spaces
Which so offended self-important wienies
And gravel-voiced chicks stuffed in small bikinis.
They banished them to some far distant star.

One April Day

To Ruth

One April day with sparkling sun, the wind
Blew us to your high house above a lake,
And there you were, your sheets and garments pinned.
You dropped your clothespins straight away to take
My mother to your door. They went inside,
While I stayed in our old grey car alone.
We hadn't come so far—a little ride,
Yet I was luggage, neutral as a stone.
And so I sat alone, all narrow limbed,
Awkward and thin, an adolescent rake,
My teeth constrained in braces, hair untrimmed,
With no words yet to speak for my own sake.
Not knowing you had noticed my red skirt,
The gypsy rose in wired teeth; the hurt.

Arthur Mortensen

Painted Pony

A model for your passion's brush, this flesh
Seems pale, a flounder's underside, a beach
Against your sky. I think you need what's fresh,
A canvas new, not scraped down and out of reach.
And yet I'm framed by your embrace; your hand
Has formed a familiar face for your romance.
Blots of pigment, thickly spread, remand
Temptation's eye for wandering from the dance.
By stretchers locked in shapes unknown before
We met, I press against the painting's plane
And find myself as flat as that cracked door
You'd push me out if I emerged to complain.
To be the light in a painter's eye gives joy
Until you find the pattern formed is a toy.

Kathryn Jacobs

Almost

The world recovered. While it lasted though
the globe went static on a sky-high scale:
somebody lit the cosmic bug-zapper
and one of us got caught. The Unscathed froze
and looked around for bodies, for a trail
of smoke, a tell-tail odor or a blur
of motion, so it didn't register

at first: the missing back-ground sounds, the squeal
of our electric insects: power down.
But it had felt as if a Ferris wheel
lock-stopped; it should have thrown us to the ground
with all the other broken people. No,
it didn't happen. But we heard it, so
we looked around, and shivered—

From the Fatlands to the Badlands

Mounds scattered on a drop-cake griddle land
like dough from sticky fingers when the pan
was hot already. Twelve-foot pitcher's mounds
cooked hard in slow-heat, lumps left in too long
cemented into place, while all around

a muted, understated, sun-bleached land
meant everything that grew was silver-gray;
there must be chlorophyll inside somewhere,
but in The Badlands green is garish.

Spare,
a sage and straw bonanza thrust roots down
so absolutely certain they belonged
that even sheep with ears like drinking cups
had all that they could do to rip them up:

nobody from the fat-lands ever stayed—

Learning to Trust

It was his tone of voice that warned me: walls,
but overgrown and acclimated; hints
that something hurt enough to quarantine
till even he forgot.

A voice like shells
crunched underfoot in driveways, like the wince
of teenage angst at forty. Time machines

accost us all; the young build citadels
and decades later you can hear them fall—
I held my breath, and waited. Not long since
he would have detoured smoothly, in denial—
and there it would have hung, both brace and cage.

Our insecurities are visceral.
But when he dropped them—well, that warm wide smile
was neither overweight, nor middle-aged.

Notes

Sally Cook lives a sequestered life in the wilds along Lake Erie, learning to see around corners. Both poet and painter, she finds that my talents reinforce each other. The resulting literary and visual work may be found in most formal venues, both electronic and hard copy, and in leading museum and gallery spaces across the country.

Kathryn Jacobs is a poet, professor, and editor of *The Road Not Taken*. Her 5th volume of poetry, *Wedged Elephant*, was recently published by Kelsey Books, and her individual poems have appeared in *Measure, Mezzo Cammin, Raintown Review, The New Formalist, Voices on the Wind* and of course *Contemporary Sonnet*. At the same time, The University of Florida Press published her *Marriage Contracts From Chaucer to the Renaissance Stage*, and she has likewise appeared in *The Chaucer Review* and *Mediaevalia*. Over a long career Dr. Jacobs took her doctorate from Harvard Univerrsity, and then taught in New Jersey and New York before settling at Texas A & M - Commerce.

Arthur Mortensen of Brooklyn has appeared in many journals and has three collections: *A Disciple After the Fact*, a novel in verse (Kaba Press); *Life in the Theater*, sequel, and *Why Hamlet Waited So Long,* San Sebastian Press.

Joseph S. Salemi teaches in the Classics Department of Hunter College (C.U.N.Y.) and the Humanities Department of New York University. He has published five books of poetry. His essays appear regularly at the on-line journal *The Pennsylvania Review*, and he has published scholarly articles in over one hundred journal world-wide.

Anna Stiritz an attorney, painter, homeschooling mother, and writer in Russellville, Arkansas. She is published in *First Things*.

Jennifer Reeser is the author of five books. Writer and former editor of *The Paris Review*, X.J. Kennedy, wrote that her first volume ought to have been a candidate for a Pulitzer. Her verse novel, *The Lalaurie Horror*, debuted as an Amazon bestseller in Epic Poetry. Her work has been anthologized in Random House, *Londons Everyman's Library*, among many other anthologies. Her poems, non-fiction and translations of Russian, French, Cherokee and various Native American Indian languages have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as *Poetry, Rattle, The Hudson Review, The Formalist, Able Muse, and Think*. Her sixth collection, *Indigenous* is forthcoming from Able Muse Press. Her website is http://www.jenniferreeser.com

Leo Yankevich's latest books are, *Tikkun Olam & Other Poems* (second expanded edition), 2012; *Journey Late at Night: Poems &* Translations, 2013; & *The Hypocrisies of Heaven: Poems New & Old,* 2016.

John Whitworth's has written twelve books of poetry, the first published in 1984. He also has written a book on writing poetry. John is published nearly everywhere.