

SONNETEERING

SPECIMENS FROM AN
EVENING OF SONNETS,
2 SEPTEMBER 2009

Curated by Eric Elshtain

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Whether Petrarchan, Spenserian, Shakespearean, caudate, chained, theophrastic, crowned, Miltonic-Italian, hidden, Jurassic, rhyme-poor, retrograde, unleaded, Paxilian, every RecRoomian sonnet will sizzle with scheme heat. Come hear Sonneteers tie on the tethers to set you free & get your neo-formalist fix fourteen lines at a time...

These sonnets were presented on the evening of September 2d, 2009 at the RecRoom (Reconstruction Room, for long) the amazing Chicago reading series founded by Eric Cressley, Erin Teegarden, and Della Watson.

The sonnets do not appear in the order in which they were recited; some sonnets included here were not recited at all... Included amongst these specimens are examples of sonnets generated or aided by Gnoetry0.2, a piece of poetry generating software. For more information on Gnoetry, use your favorite search engine.

14 Thoughts About Sonnets

Every sonnet argues with itself.

Every sonnet argues with other sonnets.

Every sonnet exists in tension.

Every good sonnet is like every good horror movie.

All sonnets are exercises in tonal breath control.

All sonnets are premonitions.

All sonnets tell us the time.

All sonnets begin at the moment of choice.

No sonnet is completely arbitrary.

No sonnet curtails liberty.

No sonnet is merely “formal.”

No sonnet is without formality.

Sonnets convert status into something physical.

Sonnets are honest laws legislated by the sonneteer.

Ghost Man

by Michael O'Leary

Three years into my dissipation
I heard von Hempel's hale hello
and accepted his invitation
to hash the Natural Man of Rousseau
over shirred eggs baked in ramekins.
A summer of *Huckleberry Finn*
had left him restless for a new
adventure and without ado
he asked me to draft his *Reflections on
the Revolution in Finance*.
With cake in hand, I seized the chance
to write the wrongs of my diction on
another's name and still get paid
to cast myself as falsely played.

Constance Distance Sonnet

by Cecilia Pinto

My mother's voice sings up
song and violin
of maids and handsome milking men.
Can I be good enough?
Hold hands and release then, swing low and aloft
bring constance
bring distance
bring me promise and loss.
See water drains from cupped hands, see?
Watch the ivy winding round oh
bluebird, oh song bird, do you sing for me?
Dandelion seeds and puff, dandelion and blow.
Bumblebee, bumblebee, barefoot sting
I hold my mother's hand and she lets go.

Bee Song

by Daniel Godston

for Eric Elshtain

Pot Marigold, Wild lilac, Redbud—bees—
Blue Blossom, Common Yarrow, Blazing Star,
They're buzzing, go for nectar, travel far,
Do Lavender or Toadflax make you sneeze?
Cellophane bees, 20,000 spe-
cies, keeping hives full, happy, up to par. . .
One beekeeper with queen got in the car,
The drones, they followed, off they went, no breeze.
More sweat bees, Midnight Penstemon, Black Sage.
They said their hives were meaner, hotter, fierce,
They make loud hums when smoked, they won't calm down.
Lavender. Raw honey's all the rage.
They're drinking honey wine and honey beers.
All glued—the kid put on a queen bee crown.

Her Shoes Were White

by Gnoetry0.2 & Greg Fraser

Estella was the matter with Estella,
very true! Until the sun, the sky,
the way, her shoes were white. The
hopeless circumstances grew by
degrees, the effort of remembrance.
The old Estella wandered to the church,
the marsh. She wended in an iron trance,
her illness on a little tray. Birch,
sky, the convict's breathing. Finches of
the shore. *Go on*, said the voice. *A man
in that direction waits, like a glove.
Quickly. Before a week, a day. A man
in that direction.* But Estella aspired
to the greatest coolness, and she were tired.

(Text statistically analyzed: *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens)

New Feminism

by Erin Teegarden

Today's woman still fluffs the pillows, arranges
the rocks. She's got boxes to receive, gifts
in white tissue paper. She's got a spotless pit
for fire, a neighbor jerking off to see her.
She can cry any time she feels like it, or go out
and get a tattoo of warm weather, find a new use
for vinegar, surrender her body to babies, or give up
the calendar all together. See how it curses her
with its x'd out days? See how it evokes a grand-
mother, who lived only to untangle the necklace chain,
only to take the name of a man for the gravestone?
Today's woman walks a trail already paved with daisy
razors, blazed by B-cups, junked with upskirt exposés.
She feels the certain sag, still secretly wants to have it all
lifted.

All This Hospitality and Kindness

by Gnoetry0.2 & Greg Fraser

All this hospitality and kindness—
it does not *accept* the first thing. Small,
he wants me—in view and not to smile. Yes,
I thought he had heard and seen it all. . .
Noble look. Rich and so. Promises
of faith and correspondence. On the evening
of “every thing go well and the oh!” he says
we’ll wed. I never have been a real thing.
We talk of the whole, the usual hour
of exploring, how ladies can never think
of pushing the paper. I protest against our
laughter now. I grow more frightened and sink
into fearful affection. London—it is
entirely a mistake. Candles everywhere. His.

(Text statistically analyzed: *Emma* by Jane Austen)

Got My Tongue

by Eric Elshtain

I've congregated ampersands to stand
for all the stammers hammered on my tongue
throughout this life. But maybe I'll command,
God willing, in the next, another lung

that I may breathe between the words some space
& say & say & say & —damn! —enough!
(One word just reached its rigor in my face
as if my minim's seven hundred ums.)

A wind—uninterrupted—forms strict laws,
but a stutter is a style all its own.
It makes my fragments independent clauses:
She gave. She made. I sought. She set. I owe.

O! transitives with no objects in line—
& all these &s in lieu of someone mine.

Sonnet 1

by Meg Barboza & Michelle Taransky

In the event you forgot the event
If you were a part of the burgeoning
Masses– The ability to mirror
The mirror is called de-moc-ra-cy &
No demand may be enforced like a fall
How far is deep, how wide is our absence
There if there is no our we may know
When in witness I set my hand to cause
The seal to care the dark has been left out
& how the rich pity the rich in vain
Call it a reason to keep quiet, friend
Call it an emergency, uncover
Long distances that burn at the season's
End you are going to lay down your stones

Sonnet 2

by Meg Barboza & Michelle Taransky

After waiting in two lines one attempts
To salvage a proposal that regards
Your house-brick propositioning street lights
They are the same as lights you know light feels
Like gravel moonshine your father said it
Like it was nothing when nothing was their
Name stuttering in line with the favored
Route to get you to be a prized horse in
A place, an order of laurels concerning
Eventual conversations– A cry:
A call, a come lightly, a ghost story
You told it to the investigator
You sold it to the newspaper again
And how to see reasons you never will

Affairs, seduction and abortion, for...

by Eric Elshtain & Gnoetry0.2

Affairs, seduction and abortion, for
created by the sounds emitted by
attacking vessels simply floated down
continued on, the same direction: love
in bed throughout the nation as a loan.
The isolation they encountered so
republic will direct the action of
the world, religion and the first anew
before the teacher must regard the laws.
The best detective on the train went West
until the president rejected North.
The attribution of the letters of
the jewels she possessed were so arranged,
composing most existing states in range.

(A cut-up sonnet composed by the human on the evening of September 2nd, 2009, with blank verse lines and heroic couplets generated by the machine earlier that day.)

In their approach in many cases but...

by Alpha Bruton & Gnoetry0.2

In their approach in many cases, but
career, the medication treatment is
the sample that receives complaints, the man;
position, where the troops were called, the queen,
the members of the king, the man in green
the standard works, in June, the best, were Dave. . . .

(A cut-up sonnet fragment composed by the human on the evening of September 2nd, 2009,
with blank verse lines and heroic couplets generated by the machine earlier that day.)

Sonnets for the Harpies

by Matthias Regan

The Tithe

It was a secret scheme he had had for saving
that took all his money in the end. Each day he delayed
his other desires another day by paving
them over, sip by little sip. He betrayed
himself by giving nothing away. He wept
less than he would have liked, but sang at parties.
He kept his liver on a shelf, hoped that like farts his
slurps from it would not be heard. He schlepped
his ass to work & schlepped it home again.
He went through vodka years, years of gin
& years of rye & why not try the wine & beer?
No partisan, he drank them dark, drank them clear.
But in the end it was delay that cost him most:
the deferment of judgment & slurped wine his host.

Intensity Sonnet

Oh the intensity! The spectacular information density
& nearly random speculation! The runaway inflation
Of images that baffle & confound: Everything's profound
& nothing matters anymore: Listen! the grating roar
Unceasing: The surface is the core; the surface is the core:
Unending interruption! A wide-screen, surround sound
You-don't-know-what-I-might-try type situation:
Like Donald Duck balling Lord Byron in a tent city
Outside the Green Zone, w/ the poet played by Sly Stallone
& the duck a manga version of the kid from Home Alone:
The sky is falling! It's a Tiffany dome of signification:
A welter of disinformation: Imagination's concatenation!

Hybridity Sonnet

Oh the hybridity! The polyphony & perverse restructuring!
Palin's lip-synched imitation of Tina Fey as Father Coughlin
Cross-fades to Obama battling the shambling horror in *The Thing*:
Exquisite intermingling! Joyful suffering! Water in the petroleum!
Blood in the Urine! In sequent toil all forwards do contend
Until by ever more rapid accumulation ends end in merger
Merger collides with derivatives & conformity's wager
Demands our residence: We move out: We join our friends
& our friends' friends: Cataclysm of conformity masking revisions
Accepted w/out complaining! Ever receptive to exceptions
We downsize our lifestyles by morphing self-perceptions:
Diminution's horizons: Cake becomes bread, bread provisions!

The Too Sweet Man

He was the sort of man who trained his ears
to feel around corners as he poured his beers
& whiskies. A frisky man who trained his eyes
to sneak under blouses & tell lies
to his lovers' spouses. A louse who trained his nose
to creep through dark cellars in search of booze,
a bruiser amid the pews who trained his tongue
to slink among bungholes like a snake in a spring.
He was the sort of man who trained his fingers
to peek into crotches where the strong water lingers
long after the wine's no longer young.
The sort of man who chased down roes
& crows & baked them into meat pies
mixed with sweet water from between your thighs.

Gut Rehab

Where vintage meets contemporary
with special footage at ten & commentary
on Sunday. A blitzkrieg's always temporary
& all terror finds advantage in seeming arbitrary
but as we're not savages its not barbarity
& as the coinage of our realm is meritocracy
there's a low-mileage rating for mediocrity.
Where vintage meets contemporary
its all about the signage. The eye's currency
that brings to cleavage its utmost sincerity
achieves optical leverage by means of a polarity
of coverage the finds balance in conformity.
The waving flags distract us from our precarity:
new fixtures & faux marble against morbidity.

Calamity Sonnet

Oh the calamity! The depravity & disease & decay!
Moral laxity! Progressive taxation! Undeserved relaxation!
Foundering banks anchor like pit bulls on yachts in the bay
& each day more half-explanations! Put your game face on
They say: Bodies that get in the way will be thrown aside!
It's going to collide! We've got to at least try! Decide! Decide!
I can't decide! Squealing & nervous twitters! Giggling jitters
In the presence of our betters: A jigger w/ a dash of bitters
Mate, they say, breezily unconcerned: You just got burned!
Already unburdened, the overachievers shrug off bad decisions
(The dogs! The leashes! All the prisons!) & play spurned
Lovers w/ new urgency: Decide! They hiss: No time for revisions!

The Letter

“Dear asshole,” the letter asked, “how many ways can I help you to hate yourself?” “O, wise letter” I replied, “having spent six months in the maze of your anger, I begin to wonder: will these halls’ fetters ever deliver upon their promise of a master plan?” “Never,” said the letter. “Your hide’s a leather I’ll lash with ink at will. The lettered brethren of my order form, monks of plaster (rather than alabaster) copy out your crime in a Kafkaesque symphony of pain.” “Well, alright,” I replied, “I guess the wimp in me is freaking out, but we’ll agree to ignore *my* pain. Feel free to leave off any time. . . . Meanwhile, your endless decree (or screed) against me further improves upon its melody the more you refuse, dear letter, to let me be.”

The Very Essence of Dreams

by Gnoetry0.2 & Greg Fraser

The very essence of dreams... *he* was it?
Through my glasses I saw next year, a mere
futility. Whirl of black feathers, queer
trunks, the devil of a street. Bit
by bit, through my glasses I saw clearly.
I saw how carefully I went from post
to post with my glass, how I put my most
to the left of us. This one, he
could work with adequate tools, but a bold
capacity for fidelity? No.
I had to wait days and days for him to go
“eh?” Enough then. He gave me a cold
and monumental whiteness—nothing more.
An, an, an exceptional man. A connoisseur.

(Text statistically analyzed: *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad)

A Sonnet for Edgar Allan Poe

by Daniel Godston

“When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image. . .”

—from *The Mask of the Red Death*

Despair is scattered bleeding on the moon.
Contagion novel figure will create.
The massy hammers hung on halls with hate,
And chandeliers will eat a gaunt buffoon.
Opprobrium tints fire-light maroon,
Grotesque green smoke caresses arms of fate
In castles glaring turns to devastate.
A thousand precincts carpet lapses soon,
Phantasms emanated ghastly vows
Whose seven chambers dream laughter’s hue,
And murmur westerly the clock bizarre.
The rushing movement jests, not knowing how.
Indulge the bells that reach new presence blue,
Incessant maddened purloined dagger scar.

the diagnosis says: you are not invincible...

by Erin Teegarden

the diagnosis says: you are not invincible, you
smeller of dope and soap filled hallways, you
smiler for trick snakes and stickers on name plates;
even if you mind your pills and pillows, you'll still
wind up deader than heath ledger, will still go
extinct like the drinking train cars, will still be
forgotten like the beggars' leftovers, lost
like the worker's whistle on a passing pretty girl.
so quit screwing around and let the mothers speak –
they don't give reasons, but insist we happen for them,
insist the heart is greater than a boxing glove; suggest
our cells are circular like the planet, the clock, the
thoughtful head. And consciousness is what pushes us
anyway, thru the dirt, the dark dream, to roses.

The passing of a new computer...

by Gnoetry0.2 & Eric Elshtain

The passing of a new computer to
another with the dormant instinct would
become our food, the next. The sun in hue
the bog itself becomes a bitter good
over a great extent because of things
perceived in other countries and sometimes
a sign. Again? The pink. The reasons. Bring
in Ross, Toronto, and the lid were crimes
against the winding street. The same techniques
in order not observed the world, returned
the old prestige. Before departing, seek
a local polling place, the barge, where burned
is an estranged relationship between
the parallels in this approach, the scene.

U.S. Triptych

by Daniel Godston

for Mom and Dad

Toledo, Mississippi, Tennessee,
Ft. Lauderdale, Ohio, Pennsylvania,
Lima, Nashville, Idaho, White Pines,
Palm Beach, El Paso, Cincinnati, Reno,
Indiana, Boise, Kankakee,
New Orleans, Tucson, Hackensack, Fort Wayne,
El Paso, Memphis, Lafayette, West Plains,
Nantucket, Chocolate Mountains, Albany,
Grand Rapids, Findlay, Perry Road, St. Louis,
Pensacola, Evanston, New York,
Kenosha, Albuquerque, San Diego,
San Francisco, Haslett, Honolulu,
Flint, Chicago, Anaheim, Dry Fork
Creek, Pittsburgh, Alabama, Santa Fe.

How We Survive a Zombie Apocalypse

by Jacob Saenz

In the movies, it's better to be black
or brown when zombies abound hungry for
flesh, our bodies tested fighting a war
for plots, for land always under attack.

Our primal instinct kicks in when we see
hordes of lumbering beings, pale corpses
like conquistadores w/out horses
ready to enslave, craving the body.

Now we train for this growing up in gangs:
where to get guns, where to run & hide from
the dead like cops that want us in prison
or dead, not bred to fight back against clans.

We live because of our blood & tribal
savage ways of slaying for survival.

Sonnet of the Dead

by Jacob Saenz

When there's no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth.

—Dawn of the Dead

We don't know when the horde will come to feast,
when the dead will dig their way out the dirt
& lurch along in throngs reeking the streets
w/the smell of hell's expelled come to earth.

We can't prepare for their hunger of flesh,
the terror of teeth tearing meat off bone.
Better to die than be bit but its best
to live, to blast a hole right in their dome.

Best to load up on canned goods & big guns,
board up windows, sharpen the machete
& stay fit for when we must split & run
toward our rescue by air or by sea.

We're built to survive & outlast the dead's
desire of what's buried deep in our heads.

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