Other books by Sarah White

_Wars Don’t Happen Anymore_

to one who bends my time
Iridescent Guest

Poems

Sarah White

DEERBROOK EDITIONS
“... your greys will gleam like the Moon,
shine like the Sun.”
with affection and gratitude,
to Muses and Makers around me
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“The study of art is the study of the relative value of things.”
—Robert Henri
as if the game
were to fish
words from a brook
with a seine
or a slotted spoon—
bug, scum, weed, leaf,

as if, from upstream,
came a fly—trout fly,
a “Royal Coachman”
my brother tied toward the end
of his life—trim feathers
floating like a grief
between the surface
and the weeds underneath.
A sweeper gathers coins from the floor of the fountain. The Ocean God looks on, glad to have more space for water and less for wishes gathered before dawn, given to the poor of Rome.

A rabbi pries with a broom slips of paper from the Western Wall, which needs no paper as mortar. What about the prayers drawn from a pilgrim’s soul and tucked between the stones? Too holy for the poor, they are buried beside worn siddurs and scriptures.

My own paper wish was whisked away by a sweeper who told me to visit the Wall and pray with the women. But ha-Shem didn’t listen when I began to speak of Beauty and Joy in a poem. The words wouldn’t come.

They needed to be changed and chanted like a psalm.
Seeing a tan and white pigeon
peck at a weed or a worm
on the walk in front of my building,
I conclude that the creature wouldn’t be there
if Mother Pigeon were one
of those bird-brains who lays
her eggs on a slanted roof.
She must have wanted this pigeon
as much as it wanted itself.

“Nobody wanted Walt Whitman but Walt Whitman wanted himself”
—Robert Henri
A child plays
with a wagon-toy
at the end of a long string—
long for him, that is—a boy
of one-and-some.

Because his mother
isn’t home, the tot
throws his plaything
into a curtained crib,
throws it very skillfully,
says Sigmund Freud,
his grandfather,

who tells how, when
the toy is out
of sight, the kid yells Gone!
Fort!

And when he pulls
the wagon back,
he hollers: Da! Here!
Thus, he throws away
a pleasure he can
himself recover,
and master, in a game,
the loss of Mother.

Freud goes on to speak
of “the artists,” working
over in their minds each day
a new ordeal of loss
whose final outcome
yields a melancholy pleasure.
Once, the Troubadour

went crusading/
carousing/
cruising,
sword in hand.

The pretty wives
of petty rivals
signaled from high windows.
Riding South
against the Pagans,
he flashed his blade
at random Jews.

As William of Aquitaine,
sworn servant of the Cross,
composed “on horseback a song
of pure nothing.”

the tune stirred the wind,
the wind stirred a storm
that soaked his saddlebags
and the ink on his maps.
From that day on,

in Christendom,
the road to Jerusalem
lies blurred and hidden.
I, Who Never Learned to Long

For the troubadours, longing was loving in its noblest form. Love-from-Afar made words into poems, made melodies rise from the score.

Soon after the last World War, my widowed mother traveled to France every year leaving me in the care of Sadie, the Maid.

When I wasn’t in school, I would play in the park and a neighbor would say:

I’ll bet you’ll be glad when your mother comes home!

Of course, you old bat, I’ll be glad when she’s home, glad to be shown her new French clothes, glad to hear of her afternoons on the shores of the River Adour.

When the Traveler returned, she told everyone how happy we were, she and I, and, at the time,

I believed her.
Immortal

Of his art and of his end,
he wrote: I will not wholly die.
Non omnis moriar. True.
Horace delights the few
though centuries have gone by.

“The stars look very cold about the sky”
Keats replies. He cares for
his brother’s consumption,
harvests autumn vines,
and transcribes the song
of the darkling nightingale,
then travels to Rome
where, in exhaustion,
contagion, and despair,
he ceases to breathe,

dying mostly,
if not wholly,

like loved poets lost in recent years—
some well-known,
some seen now and then
in little magazines.
What Beauty is For

“What we call beauty is neither wholly purposeful nor entirely random.”

Did heavenly intention
create long-lashed Persian
looks in order to protect
Persian eyes from blowing sand?
Were nose and sinuses designed
to temper Persian spices?

Or did Beauty’s voice
summon sandstorms
in the first place, to sift
the cardamom and mace,
and create, for princesses
of Teheran, grand
enamel headdresses?

Purposeless, the long debate.
Somber and stumbling
is the mind. A lark
leaps to the sun,
turns, swoops low,
weighted with reasons
Reason doesn’t know.
Jacopo Robusti
came to the name “Little Dyer”
after
his father’s trade,
and before
he dyed his grand diagonals

where Christ’s mother,
in The Deposition from the Cross,
slants,
swooning, away from the other
falling figures
(so she cannot see
the son she’s lost)

as I myself recoil from
most sacred pictures,
though not
from this, completed
as it was
by the painter,
his two sons, and his daughter
(admirable
lesser artists), conceived
as it was
by the Little Dyer’s love
for his city of color,
industry, and water.