

I Goldfarb

Promised Land

for IJ

Terre promise

Sous ta peau je vois couler
les sources des fleuves-mères
au-delà des collines hautes de ton visage
les vallons interdits font vivre
tels fourmillements telles peuplades

Moïse d'en haut j'étreins
toute ta carte
terre promise terre refusée

Promised Land

Beneath

shimmerings of sense, the simplest attraction
imagines depths from sight abstracted
as touch penetrates the skin
into invisible flesh

your

attributes are all you are
but capable of assimilation
one day at lunch
a chicken-wing became you
as well as several onlookers
absorbed in white flashes of teeth

skin

taut enough to write on
surrounds her almost wholly
but the subject of the narrative
lies in the orifices

I

naming coincidentally the locus of the promise
cannot draw nearer its object
existing only before it

see

the land dissolved in mist yet unmistakable
unfigured yet compact
from that point peripheral
other to significance
the eye would commemorate
only a lash remains
of vision more than sight

flowing

process not structure
disorder self-maintained
rhythms first felt in the blood
linking river to river
the garden forever encircled

the sources

promise beginnings denied
ancestral lines converging
to common pursuits and places
the dance turning inward
from surface discretion

of the rivers

nothing is known
save that the sunken island
transfigured them to sea

maternal

paradox, self-substitution
the landscape fills out from within
like Combray from a teacup
its membrane undisturbed

At that moment she stood in the center of the universe. The sun illuminated her like a pyre. Her mouth was open to speak. Beneath her clothing her body was infinite. I was reduced to a point.

No description of the universe could endure as long as that moment.

Beyond

all models of perception
stretches of absence reward
exceeded appetites

the high

jagged crags
wind-eaten by the desert
pliant cones
await the eye's credulity

hills

the indifferent climb
I aspire airless to ascend
imbibing with an infant tongue
sweet milk sublimed to snow

of your face

only the defects beckon
a sometime blemish or timeless
a smile whose wound lies deeper
as substance transcendently distant
belies its accidents

the valleys

of earthly delight
are lush with the fruit of glaciers
depth from height is endowed
a woman's body like language
signifies through contrast

forbidden

to self-denegation
recompense ever delayed
perfection unto death
image unknowable
never yet innocent
spero quia absurdum

nourish

parched hopes of salvation
tearless eyes transfixed
on vision become sight
had we forty years more
to stand in its presence

such multitudes

surround the central pyre
unsinged by the conflagration
at an awesome distance
the fire consumes me

such peoples

whose baleful idols withhold
from us the sacred precinct
disfigure them to dust
for man to be new-molded

At the doorstep time and space are immeasurable. No dream-change from together to apart, but the wrenching of great differences of degree. My arms held the earth's circumference. I still bear the mark of its mountains and oceans.

Moses

face to face with otherness
led the anonymous race
to the sunswept expanse of desire

from above

the sunset and the seas
an island innocent of life
its surface already quadrillated
in centerless interdiction

I embrace

more than air in indifference
to know love and land's refusal
realizes our lives' equidistance

the map

lies flat upon mountains
yet creased by meandering roadbeds
actual tracks of potential
return to the center, or best
exceed the periphery

entire

at a proper distance
hair to heels in vision
each gestural transformation
leaves desire's kernel fixed

land

wet with tears and milk
my son's hard palms shall press
the heat of your soil
but not even in love's dry death
shall I lie within you

promised

unique chimaera to each
her body led us forth
long arms in her hair like serpents
mouths open at her breasts
on the cinders of domesticity
we lay in alien bondage
feet twitching with lust
for the hillocks of sand

land

to which
space of
openness
windblown scent of lilies
footfalls of far caravans
sun-flashes at the horizon

refused

imagination's blasphemy
in vision too nearly possession
only ineffable absence
inspires the sightless singer

Else would cease the knowledge beyond time that death and life signify. I taste yet now too much the sugared wine. The sole sign exceeds the fragility of the promise.

Avatars of the muse

i

I see of you but what a child could see
your hair whatever color and your eyes'
youth flowering for another and for me
verses to sing desire's melancholy

But being One you cannot multiply
your infertility's my guarantee
I love your absence absent my success
if you could love me you'd love someone else

Stay frozen then forever and be mine
Yet the geology of flowing ice
is but a viscous science of decay

while in a teaspoon of unplanned recall
long centuries of dying are unlearned
reader of Proust you've not forgotten this

All language writes itself a Madeleine
I learn to live from moments without life
to see by odor's sightless memory
of roses shut unbloomed within your album

or love in sacrificing human hearts
to my insouciant muse so rich in time
whose love-tales all reproachful of my own
I have no heart to voice

Where immobility is permanence
absence surrounds her person like a night
I would not dare a closer view of it

changing the little that in time we must
with what new song could I recompensate
the ceaseless retrogression of the muse?

Half-sonnets from abroad

i

This spurious sweetness conceals
the dream's bad debt to the daylight
the bent of an old relation
subsists in an absence of substance

so I will speak not of love
but privation, nor even of friendship
but the wry joy of endless awaiting

ii

No more nostalgia the present
is equally gone with the past
we have grown older not closer
nor farther but across the ocean

face to face in recognition
Belonging's not for us nor separation
this nameless being-for's our authenticity

iii

In the solemnity of old desire
no longer knowing physical from moral
I ask of you no token of consent
still less acknowledged reciprocity

exchanging words or silence
awaiting or receiving
our distance is our presence

iv

A cabin in the woods beside a lake
the well-worn idyll of the Suisse Romande
know I what populates your solitude
the petty comforts of your intimacy?

I would know all these things and yet renounce
all knowing but a postcard from afar
to know your landscape is to know the rest

v

There's no love without irony
Madonnas stripped on bloody shrines
their pedestals ground down like bone
we burn what we adore

or else indifferent hearts conceal
a sacred precinct others might
call love—you shake your head, you smile

Envoi

We sang the marvelous immortal flesh
as if it needed not our singing
regeneration's ruse deferred
in paeans of thanksgiving

Of love's young opera the music
fades but in the words
we hear the music