

K
A 21ST CENTURY
CANZONIERE

I GOLDFARB

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by I Goldfarb
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BlazeVOX [books]
131 Euclid Ave
Kenmore, NY 14217

Editor@blazevox.org



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1

Introit

Spirits of the air attest
air's communion will be blest
if divined nubility
crystallize its airiness

breezy talk of things we see
as you sit across from me
makes of our exchange of breath
zephyrine community

2 (I)

To greet me in old age the goddess
redescends as my sexy granddaughter
resplendent in new incarnation
two steps removed from procreation

could my symbols engender her substance
all the birds would fall from the sky
life on earth would perish or wish to
in small death and regeneration

I awake in the chill of the morning
to the merciful curse of her absence
from my dream's impenetrable sadness

whence I dare only waking or dying
to extract this shadowy offering
for the black hole of transfiguration

3 (II)

I cannot embody a spirit
that is not incarnate in a body
though God's everywhere in creation
my cathedral I set in your bosom

Transcendence we learn from the eye
that defends its chaste offer of beauty
lest what may be seen in pornography
redraw Hell's and Heaven's topography

Could Homer see he'd sing like Sappho
whose heart's sight envisioned her hearing
to prefer her beloved's sweet rustle

to the battlefield's clangor and rattle
Leave the poetry prose can accomplish
to the praise of professors of English

Hors série

4

*To see you is to be
caressed by the ineffable
to possess in my soul
what possesses us all*

*erotic intensity
the ultimate chastity
I share Teresa's ecstasy*

5

*The thrill of crowds is nothing to
the thrill of bodies
our once communal lives
now turn upon a promise
abstracted from biology*

*to see in outline
your breasts in a summer dress
then let the species perish*

6 (III)

Paltry verses that will never
reach perfection yet if not
poorly honor one whom nature
has so masterfully wrought

yet as the pen its work refines
by time's pollution undecayed
anatomy's perfections fade
and souls survive alone through signs

whence gratitude? yet acts of care
demand no reciprocity
what we admire the most let share

its wonderful fortuity
lovers who live their love in words
must sing their melodies unheard

7 (IV)

What can a sonnet give to you
who seek no immortality
but plot your life's utility
within the world, as we all do

I cannot grant your heart's designs
but for contenting my desire
that our old sun still flash with fire
I offer you these fourteen lines

Would that my effort to express
sublimed affection's chaste address
convey a measure of your worth

True love would win for you the earth
my only gift to you is time
crystallized for you in my rhyme

8 (V)

Sonnet posthume

Although my verses go unread
they bring you honor more not less
knowing no hope of vain success
could swell this old unlaureled head

I sing no carols to the crowd
nor banners bear before the world
flying a flag in fondness furled
I speak within and not aloud

This bauble from another shore
let it make mirrors of your eyes
to shine on what was dark before

persuading you of how I prize
the joys of friendship and of sight
I take with me to that good night

9 (VI)

How many lines end and begin
as if they timelessly repeat
the celebration of a feast
as would life's gyre forever spin

our repetitions steel the edge
of time that one day cuts them off
each writer's final paragraph
ends in the middle of the page

Unlike the cycling round of rite
human creation flows like life
the poet's well is not refilled

turns and returnings drain his will
the year revives but he does not
let this be by no Muse forgot

10 (VII)

Beyond the vain hope of a smile
embarrassed for the ill-spent hours
that help stave off old age awhile
as though I changed my time for yours

how can I help you win in life
an unpoetic happiness
a self-fulfilling power to thrive
within the sensual world, not this

That gift I'd give you were I able
for use and not for sacrament
yet I'll record my sentiment

someone may need to know the rage
that spills my tears upon the page
I scribble at the kitchen table

11 (VIII)

Incarnation

Our cardhouse quivers at the coming of
Apocalypse; in feckless guilt we love
the loves of those who hate us and our doubt
the race will see the new millennium out

lacking a grand Idea to save us all
I celebrate my single sacred awe
your habitation of a human body
demanding yet denying symmetry

Our being takes its form about a soul
to touch more tender than the flesh's founts
of sense to touch on which poets renounce

marking with words their glorious withdrawal
would each to each express such reverence
sweet harmony would reign in difference

12 (IX)

In all the world of pretty girls
how can I say I write for you
writing *for you* when faithless words
neither in love nor hate are true

words being only words unmoor
from the occasion as we try
despairingly to specify
in words what databases store

Truly the poet's I's untrue
glancing at this one and at that
claiming that *I* am real and you

a *shifter*—yet though you know not
which pretty girl you are *I* do
and know I write these words for *you*

13 (X)

In lieu of our mortality's
vain hope some sign of us survives
in living legates of our lives
I would preserve the memory

of your embodied proof that Time
in our long journey unto death
allows us halts in the sublime
to let the breeze ensoul our breath

moments of immortality
where we arrest desire in time
to see your image in my mind

lets me forget the face of death
to see you in reality
old Time himself would hold his breath

Envoi pour accompagner ces sonnets

I've no brief for their quality
or their publishability
or for their readability
or minimal utility

if you should come to question them
you'd likely find expressed in them
laments of lost virility
harbingers of senility

yet an imperative divine
bids me extol the tender soul
your body helps me to divine

more than for Platonists of old
the earthly beauty that I see
embodies paradise to be

TERRE RETROUVÉE I

15

Scorning desert's bleak survival
our lives' capital we spend
courting chimeras of hope
at each mirage around the bend
when at last our feet touch topsoil
forty years across the sand
we have lost our zeal for planting
and the tilling of the land

Yet I would do nothing over
now that I've held on till Zion
let a younger generation
sow its seed and take command
while I revel in the wonder
to have reached the Promised Land

16

The awed familiarity
that in your absence dissipates
and presence in its way frustrates
is happiest in poetry
words written never to be said
flicker in fiction's middle space
evoking airy states of grace
between life's boredom and death's dread

Composed within and out of time
my sonnets seek no denouement
but silent speak to you alone
let them our distant lives entwine
real and ideal affection join
absence and presence make as one

For love that *I love you* declares
 mere poetry is optional
I love you between lovers shares
 anticipations nuptial
 yet love that cannot speak of love
 concealed in sonnets never sent
 lacking *I love you's* hot intent
 a greater warmth of heart might prove

The verses that true lovers write
 to court or flirt or to seduce
 are instruments of daily life
 I write without worldly excuse
 for one I could not love so late
 yet with my heart's care consecrate

Beatrice

Our feelings and our senses
 merge yet remain unique
 desire seeks joy not pleasure
 each is renowned by all
 the blessed of the nations
 lavish on us their secrets
 celestial music sparkles
 like laughter of pretty girls

Prelapsed Jack and Jill
 I follow you uphill
 to the light that makes the stars
 in eyeshut darkness shine
 my fancy's perfect spectacle
 is its proof ontological

If I loved you
 I could not love you better
 not to call it love
 is sign of love's election
 in response to the blessing
 I learn to do nothing
 but give where gift is needed
 and giving make my need

Miracle of the desert
 an inward flow of being
 inundates my dry soul
 and springs its portals open
 richer in love to give
 yet not to call it love

Cinécriture

We are not made for more
 than brevities of bliss
 a bullseye a first kiss
 a bargain at the store
 the joy I find in you
 that punctuates my solitude
 with intervals of plenitude
 so far exceeds my due

it pervades the white space
 that separates my thought
 from its moment of grace
 my life and writing draw
 from glimpses of your beauty
 a moving continuity

CRISE

Memo to the Muse

If I had my druthers
 I'd write for no others
 writing in adoration
 is my Bronxian vocation
 but friends tell me my verse albeit impassioned
 is embarrassingly old-fashioned
 that lyric in the tradition of Sappho and Petrarch
 is no longer in the ballpark
 that poetry is about absence and only victimitude
 gives one bragging rights on plenitude

what disturbs them is the closure of the couple
 be its unity only virtual
 because assumed by whoever writes for
 his Muse conjuring by a mere formal
 gesture a utopian community
 of which we all realize the unrealizability
 I could go on writing sonnets
 but they'll bring no glory on us
 your implicit protection makes my best efforts look easy
 like a boy crying Look Ma no hands doing a wheelie

So this is the last I'll address you for a time
 though I hope we'll keep forever our sublime
 universe of dialogic sun and air
 all the more beautiful because you're unaware
 of it; an idyll undisturbed
 that would be by revelation fatally perturbed
 I must take note when readers utter curses
 and smile with condescension at even my best verses
 because they coexist in an imaginary sphere
 with my Muse so pure and clear
 yet regardless of appearance I will always write for you
 about which I'll perhaps leave a posthumous clue
 hoping to provoke a smile or tear or suffuse
 you with pride that the *poète* chose you as Muse
 although the choice was never his to choose

What other poetry there is to write needs some exploring
hedgehogs are too cute and rocks and trees too boring
no doubt the greatest feat if I can do it
would be to remain in your virtual presence without referring to it
as I can write poems *that* pretend you're reading them
so I should write poems *and* pretend you're reading them
and thereby bathe the world in that infinite tenderness
that readers may find cloying when I let it self-express
but projected beyond you and me it can all things embrace
tempering life's misery with Mnemosynic grace

O Muse your election makes of me
a better person in a world I see
not through your eyes but through
the eyes that have seen you