

Classic Poetry Series

John Williams

- poems -

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A Benediction Of The Air

In every presence there is absence.

When we're together, the spaces between
Threaten to enclose our bodies
And isolate our spirits.
The mirror reflects what we are not,
And we wonder if our mate
Suspects a fatal misreading
Of our original text,
Not to mention the dreaded subtext.
Reality, we fear, mocks appearance.
Or is trapped in a hall of mirrors
Where infinite regress prevents
A grateful egress. That is,
We can never know the meaning
Of being two-in-one,
Or if we are one-in-two.
What-I-Am is grieved at What-I'm-Not.
What-We-Should-Be is numbed by What-We-Are.

Yes, I'm playing word games
With the idea of marriage,
Musing over how even we can
Secularize Holy wedlock.
Or to figure it another way,
To wonder why two televisions
In the same house seem natural symbols
Of the family in decline.

Yet you are present to me now.
I sense you keenly, at work,
Bending red in face to reach
A last defiant spot of yellow
On those horrific kitchen cabinets.
Your honey hair flecked with paint;
Your large soft hidden breasts
Pushing down against your shirt.
The hemispheres of those buttocks
Curving into uncompromising hips.
To embrace you would be to take hold
Of my life in all its substance.

Without romance, I say that if
I were to deconstruct myself
And fling the pieces at random,
They would compose themselves
Into your shape.
But I guess that is romantic,
The old mystification-
Cramming two bodies
Into a single space.

Amen!

Our separation has taught me
That, dwelling in mind,
The corporeality
Of mates has spiritual mass
Which may be formulated:
Memory times desire over distance
Yields a bodying forth.
Thus I project into the
Deadly space between us
A corposant, Pulsating a language
That will cleave to you
In the coolness of sleep
With insubstantiality
So fierce as to leave its dampness
On the morning sheets,
Or so gentle
As to fan your brow
While you paint the kitchen.
A body like a breath,
Whispering the axiom
By which all religions are blessed:

In every absence there is presence.

Bene
Bene
Benedictus.

Submitted by David Shackelford

John Williams

Ode To The Only Girl

I've seen you many times in many places--
Theater, bus, train, or on the street;
Smiling in spring rain, in winter sleet,
Eyes of any hue in myriad faces;
Midnight black, all shades of brown your hair,
Long, short, bronze or honey-fair.
Instantly have I loved, have never spoken;
Slowly a truck passed, a light changed,
A door closed--all seemingly pre-arranged--
Then you were gone forever, the spell was broken.
Ubiquitous only one, we've met before
A hundred times, and we'll meet again
As many more; in hills or forest glen,
On crowded street or lonely, peaceful shore;
Somewhere, someday--but how will we ever know
True love, how will we ever know?

John Williams

Swing Song

The blatant horns blare strident sound;
Delighted, you laugh and seize
My passive arm, but I have found
Content in the harmonies.
They sound, are silent; please or annoy,
Are not clever, cruel, or coy
Like human qualities.
See agile fingers in frantic flight
Along the smoking row
Of piano keys cut from ebony night
And from the sullied snow
Of the city. Look love, listen love, tell me--
Where does the music come from really,
Where does it really go?
Planets are tensed to a single chord
Of absolute harmony
Sounding from a cosmic keyboard,
Unheard by you and me;
Yet we re attuned; who understands
That can see the judgment-hands
Poised above the keys.

John Williams