

From "Sonetti Petrarcheschi" (from *The Gardens of Flora Baum*)

9. DISSI 'L VER

Ovid saw Virgil, Petrarch Dante. I
Never stared rapt at Yeats or Frost or Pound
Or Eliot or Stevens. Does the sound
Of the great fathers, with their vision, die?

The widows and the daughters do not lie,
For they divine that as the world spins round
Their men may all precede them underground
Yet go before them up into the sky.

Nine are ye Muses. Come from Helicon,
Dance from Parnassus, shimmer in the blue
Like nine moons, sweet celestial spheres all ringing.

Cassandra's words, unheeded, yet live on.
Sibylla's leaves, though scattered, still sift through.
Daphne, immortal sung, must triumph singing.

10. FACENDOMI D'UOM VIVO UN LAURO VERDE

The man, the poet, turned into the laurel
Itself, which he had thought would be his crown.
With all of his regret or his renown
Comes my relief because this simple moral

Serves to alleviate my unwilled quarrel
 And smooth away my undesired frown
 And take my flaming rage and let it drown
 In sunset seas of ruby, sapphire, coral.

Must I regret my love? Each verdurous bough
 Issues the fragrant sempiternal breeze
 Mingling in spring with vernal fragrant gold.

Thus that which lived then is that which lives now,
 He whom she meets as, straying through the trees,
 She finds young, vigorous, what is grand, old.

12. A FERRAGOSTO LA ROBINIA DEL GIAPPONE A CAMBRIDGE NEL MASSACHUSETTS

One must read spring in August when each bough
 Whitens with blossom. This is not Japan.
 This is not Rome, not Florence, not Milan.
 Is to assume assumption to kowtow

To possibilities that would endow
 Our matter, like this bright etherial fan,
 With bright celestial change, surpassing man
 Or woman? No pagoda stands here now.

This is mere middle August. A pagoda
 Tree is now blooming here, and that is all.
 Well, there is speech. This is the Scholars' Tree.

This is not Padua. There is a coda.
 If this is not Bologna one may call
 This garden still a university.

14. LAUREOLA

Did he not say then: You are barbarous,
 Or if he did not say did he not think
 There was some problem with the kitchen sink
 To mention which might not be courteous?

Every experiment is perilous.
 The brinksmen loves the pleasure of the brink
 So well he laughs with joy at every link
 Which critics laugh at as incongruous.

Sunflower, August's image of the sun,
 Or image of an image which we knew
 To be of that which was beyond compare,

Be a comparison, not ever un-
 Thinkable even crayoned as we drew
 That bright face and those golden rays of hair.

15. LA DISIATA VOSTRA FORMA VERA

Who was the aureoled, the auricome,
 Seen of a summer on a golden hill?
 Whose was the springal step that reached the dome
 In springtime, when I hardly knew my will

But followed on the stairway through the gloam
 That heralds light and love and joy until
 The follower finds that the stars fulfil
 The promises? I promised Rome and tome.

One was aureolate, one argentine.
 The gleaming godlike foot, the burning hair
 Are now one vision in which I can hold

One great desideration. How can I hold the line
 Between external steep and inner stair
 If there were two, one silver and one gold?

16. PRESSO A L'EXTREMO

The form was broken. Thus the end was near.
 She might pretend that she could play the game
 But surely it would never be the same
 When rules were ruined and the way was clear

To anything, the hazy atmosphere
 Of anywhere, in which the stars became —
 In which the stars stayed — distant. Shall we blame
 The superannuated sonneteer?

The summer had been emptying its coffers.
 The sculptors had exhausted all their quarries.
 Statues of lapis laughed. How can you dun

September for past taxes when it proffers
 Such a blue morning, such blue morning glories,
 Such golden sunflowers, such golden sun?

18. INDICE

I looked forever to dawn's ancient gold
 And found my flight was pointed toward the west,
 From which new land the sun slipped off to rest
 In an immense sea. I saw only old

Columns, old-world laurels, antique mold,
 The sea that seemed to me less edge than nest
 For storied scribes of lands storied and blest,
 In my mind's eyes. My eyes, you were cajoled

By beauty, beauty, beauty, fresh, clean, bright.
 Moon, earth, and sun queued up. The tides grew sheer.
 The year would finish soon. The moon was blue.

The city glittered. The gold bridge was light.
 Bridge, hills, and ocean rose, descended. Here
 The sun set, but the year in Rome was new.

19. BIOGRAFIA

He to the modern was a gold aurora
 Gleaming upon another's bright gold hair.
 She in late afternoon breathed that clear air
 Of dawn as postpostmodernism's aura.

He so loved he could almost be his Laura
 And in his voice her voice was doubly rare.
 What could she say or be or do or dare?
 Could she love if she had to be her Flora?

Francesco, San Francisco glitters. Gold
 May glitter and be gold. Behold, oh, rush
 To glean the city's sheen hills if not home.

Petrarca, Harvard glitters. Quick, oh, hold
 The warm books to your heart. The ticks, the hush
 Are ice on Widener's steps. But such is Rome.

20. SOFFIETTO EDITORIALE

Reader, she loved him, for she loved to read
 And he read what she read and loved the high
 Linguistic hills and stretching word-starred sky
 Toward which she stretched. Some hills were thickly treed,

Some trees were silver, some boughs had been freed
 From glaciation and would never die
 Of ice or sighing, for the verdant cry
 That rose among them carried golden seed.

What young Apollo crowns her curls with bays?
 What new Maecenas seconds this grand call?
 The rhododendrons narrow in the vise

Of January. Janus smiles toward Mays.
 Watch the great shadows from great angles fall.
 See the great shades from highest peaks arise.

21. FASCETTA

A day in January is the date
 On the book's wrapper. Janus, wrap it tight,
 If it is bellicose. Night falls. Dawn's light
 Shines on rain faintly. Janus, close the gate.

The floods rush roughly. Janus, do not wait.
 War's doors must shut. They must be shut. No fight
 Is the good struggle. Two-faced double sight
 Sees this both ways now. Janus, it is late.

This is not literature or love or life.
 Guerra is feminine, Krieg masculine,
 And bellum neuter like imperium.

Are passion's platitudes or sex or strife
 Grammatical? Out of the flame what jinn,
 Out of the flood what Jani ever come?

22. CONGEDO

The little book takes wing and lightly flies
 To you, its father, leaving me below
 As mortal wives of deities must know
 Occurs so that the hero verifies

His half-divine condition. Recognize
 Your child. Upon his golden head bestow
 Evergreen evergold angelic glow.
 Angelic doves may murmur in your skies.

Our skies sustain metallic murderous geese.
 You sing in heavenly eternal rest.
 I walk where earthly wolves and weasels march.

As you did, I go screaming peace, peace, peace.
 Watch how the sanguine sun has splashed the west.
 In the east see a rosy rainbow arch.

23. ECO

If the eve of the eve significant
 For sanctity and poetry and love
 Presented solely gray of cloud above
 Yet when the sun went down magnificent

Not gold perhaps but scarlet bars were sent
 Up from the set spent splendor not to shove
 The clouds roughly aside but just to hover
 Through and with and in them, radiant

Themselves because the clouds themselves were they
 As they became bright clouds and, facing these,
 An arc of rose triumphed, and if an eve

Later, late on the eve of Agnes' day,
 Not green perhaps but white stripes on the trees
 Were pure caresses, won't you find reprieve?

26. SAGGIO DI FLORA BAUM

Is there a Rome to which the road must tend
 Or is desire itself desirable?
 What if the brimming pigments could not fill
 The canvas, the toccata touch its end,

The purple bud stretch and expand and blend
 Itself in paler purpleness until
 The perfect palest pinks traverse the sill
 And wing into the whitenesses that pend?

What if my author, my authority,
 Never steps through the rampart's brazen gate,
 Boldly surveys the city with my eyes

Never, and never dons harped liberty
 For which my patient sagging shoulders wait?
 O Rome, rise up before her. O Rome, rise.

27. APPENDICE: LEONARDO OLSCHKI E L'USIGNUOLO DI COLOMBO

She has to go to hear the nightingale.
 Just as the evening star sings to the moon
 In those blue halls resounding, just as at noon
 The yellow rose beside the bright black rail

Sings to the yellow sun (Bright sun, inhale
 The fragrance, grace, and aura of the tune
 That rises up the sunbeams through a June
 Of yellow rose), just as a first still frail

Dawn sings to dark, it sings. But not at home.
 It does not live here in America.
 It lives in Europe. To be more precise,

She may just find it if she just finds Rome.
 Columbus found it in America.
 The nightingale must sing in Paradise.

28. AL SUON DE' DETTI

But was his nightingale our mockingbird
 That sings us dulcet death, death, death, death, death?
 O live, O last, life, spirit, holy breath,
 Be near and be discovered, hear and be heard,

Enduring exhalation and brief word,
 Initial, iteration, aleph, beth,
 And the great O. O be, she says, she saith,
 She cants in accents loud and faint and surd,

She writes in minor and in major letters,
 In formal and in liberated verse,
 In the most closed antiquarian prose,

In clauses that have cast off ancient fetters,
 In sentences now lengthy and now terse.
 Troy fell in endless ruin. But Rome rose.

29. IL MIO BEL VELO

The veils of the virgilians of May
 Stayed with her spirit. Thus the belle, the bride,
 Might recollect the early public pride
 And private termination of her day,

And thus the saint, amidst green, white, and gray
 Nebulousness that sometimes seems to slide
 From the great presence, sometimes to abide
 Through deep communion, might in visions pray.

Will we find irises here and Iris there,
 Here the purpureal, the aureal,
 The candid standards rising from dark loam,

There satin banners floating through bright air,
 Her sashes, wings, and veils, memorial
 Virgilians here and Virgil there in Rome?

30. FRA LOR CHE 'L TERZO CERCHIO SERRA

It was the year of the virgilians.
 Everywhere we walked we found the lace
 And fragrance filling, frilling time and space
 Frivolously and solemnly. It was

A year of pilgrimage. America's
 Flora will not so soon be commonplace.
 Frolicsomeness and sanctity embrace
 Our maples, tulip trees, robinias,

Our dogwoods, yellowwoods, and mountain laurel,
 But above all the yellowwoods. Increase,
 Form the third circle, be upon our lips

Virgilians, looked at, loved, supremely floral.
 We glimpse the silver boughs, the silver fleece.
 We pray: O keep the firebrands from our ships.

31. LAUREA

The thesis possibly comes down to this:
 The yellowwood is the virgilia.
 What can that mean? Abandoned genera
 Are hardly scientific. Does she miss

Old nomenclatures? Is her very bliss
 The obsolete? *Cladrastis lutea*
 Will serve or even *C. kentuckea*.
 She studies arbor (*arbos*), *arboris*,

And the eponymy surrendered now
 To fractured Greek in Latin and a free
 Choice among terms in languages more oral.

The yellow wood she calls the golden bough.
 Virgilia she feels is Virgil's tree.
 Why does she long and long then for the laurel?

32. IN PARTE OV' ERA

Two together! Winds blow north, blow south.
 O westerlies, across the western seas
 Carry me to the gates of Hercules
 And haste me, hero-cradled, to the mouth

Of my great father. Tiber, speak. Not south,
 As your words ripple, but against the tease
 Of noon and sunset guide me. Harmonies
 Of speech and song from the paternal mouth

Must lead me, lone and lonely, to my good,
 To my great dawn. Hymns, incense, butterflies,
 A golden branch, a golden leaf, a look

Into or out of beech or yellowwood
 Will speed me to the spouse into whose eyes
 One gazes when one holds the opened book.