

PETER CARRAVETTA

THE SUN
AND
OTHER THINGS

POETRY



GUERNICA



At times somber, at times playful, often dramatic and critical of our times, straddling the lyrical and the allegorical, *The Sun and Other Things* is a metamorphic journey through language, history, styles, and particular events in the poet's mind and life. Written over a period of twenty years, the poems gathered in this collection inscribe possibilities for uttering what in principle

Cannot be expressed.

"Peter Carravetta's *The Sun and Other Things* is an intriguing poetic journey through time and the Western psyche as manifested in both hemispheres. The trip is impressive in both scope and ambition"

—Lawrence R. Smith, editor of *Caliban*.

"Carravetta has forged an impassioned and memorable rhetoric for his poetry ... The reader is taken through visionary landscape reminiscent of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and hallucinatory realities that echo *The Waste Land* and *Howl* ..." — Frederick Buell.

Peter Carravetta is Professor of Italian and Director of the World Studies at Queens College/CUNY.

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but to set out late in the Spring
 sketching and fencing the droning ferment
 chasing sprinkling diadems
 in the rapids and the deltas of countless paths
 and then believe

and do actually believe
 in the casual glance to the sun
 glowing triangles willow trees poppy fields and
 the patterned recurrence of strange city streets

but it was Spring

Helios

unreal solstices flushed with golden
 notes of stillborn dieties and heroes and men
 prone to speak battle sputter meandering through
 the teeming valley of the Tigris
 the Tiber, yes, the Thames, yes again,

but also

and most importantly

the chestnut groves and olive trees cradling the

Kratis

as well as the untold dramas the hesitations
 the refuse along the Hudson and Harlem and
 Hutchinson rivers and parkways

persons and ghosts and gods
 whose optics were their doom
 and the everyday

Helios

always really the placid reassuring backyard

garden for many lives

and much displeasure too...

incriminating the actions of those bygone
because

Helios

(suckers they are!)

they gone!

many there will be glassy eyed rancid coughing
 jotting down in the folds of darkness
 the elements the gasps of the journey
 many times he'll see and foresee the flux
 the rhythms of dances dances
 talents deployed and some bile too

and of these many have said
 that it is no use - really, it ain't -
 to rumble through the clouds the gorges the basement
 shelters

and again actually believe
 (recurrence, Helios, remember?)
 that phantasmagoric virtues and visions striking the mind's
 eye

are gyrating relentlessly into
 utter uselessness

but lightworks
 but fleshed out ideas
 they will they will be

there's a bubbling mass heaving on the horizon
Listen
Helios
and it's been
seeking
a gesture
for such a long time, now
it's a very serious question
meant primarily for you
(but let us speak just to Helios, ok?)
so
Helios
please bear with me
friend and teacher sister and ancestor lover or enemy
even though I am
and shall ever be
aware of you
heartless torch
focus on the knots
ganglion to misunderstandings
radioactive core and basin
the delta
black pits

the mirror and the page, *surtout*,

Helios

contemplating stoically the situation

(and like I said more than once:
stereo blasting your favorite tunes
warm robe and warm smiles awaiting
a real delight to imbibe and cavort
wanting was only a critical attitude ...)

inheriting somehow the skin the wind the will

worse yet the wishing well

wanting the Words that say it all

at times unuttered revelations tiny and grand

at times unetched images from dream day or night

most readily, however,

simple words saying the same damn thing

over and over and over again

like now,

Helios, écoute!

the print speaks the first person

of the indicative

(flirting with the Muses, tensing the optative, too)

making it a menace for the ego

solus,

exposed as such so blatandy

to all those murderous hearts

.....

Whether prowling the citynights with tactile fury

or rummaging the daylight in duty-spun mirages

there was no thread no stone no retaining wall
to the relentless cautery of shapeless encounters
circling instinctually the hollow parallelepipeds
like them conniving bipeds

my friend good old buddy from Stratford-in-the-Bronx
 he says 1 am wrong he insists 1 take this too damn seriously
 he also cannot understand traveling without Charlie
 or hunting down the crests and swerves of consonants

begin necessarily by
 screening the *palus putredinis*
 occasionally a *canto* or a *canzone*
 juxtaposing Baudelaire's poems

plucking out the ones that sparkle
 with dissent, with torbid irony,
 and methodological disgust

one of those writings
 whose mood and confusion
 of mnemonic configurations
 speak of dark, dark city streets and cold
 cold and brilliant crystalline figurations
 figuring out matter, substance and substitutes...

all those experiences you will imagine
 all those memories you will evoke
 all those critical stances you will assume
 all of these and maybe more
 will spread like petals before you
 will persuade you to admit
 (they will force you to admit they've opened themselves to

you,

Helios)

that echoing *Cantos* and galled flowers and evil city streets
and meandering sensations by day and words at night
NO! they have not relented
there's no stopping the passion the paradox

Helios, *escuchame*

poetry yours and mine
is only primarily ART

(that it is, also, ONLY art)

and not what ought to
concern peoples and popes and parliaments
(certainly not in our Res-publie:
think: Pound Pasternak Pasolini)

Helios, *ascolta*

what means are we granted beyond
the insignia defiant of speaking
and scream and whisper
and talk and ring
and purr and groan

as the situation demands

as the spirit spontaneously feels

as the synthesis of a vision commands

oh

Helios, *listen*

pretend if you must that I'm the mouth of truth
(I know you'll understand me now)
and toss into the turbines these tainted notions
that your past epochs and seasons and books
and all these scribes posthumously gentrified
are as interesting and deadly and both beautifully
so as having the certainty of a gratuitous
unnerving paradoxical existence

Helios, *read*

read and twitch the fascias of your desires
as each word howls
 shorting the synapses
 for a soul that knows

1. 1972: I ran about this place

Only a few seconds ago
I ran about this place
Only yesterday, scared of vipers
Picking on sunning lizards.

Poor creatures, tortured, I guess
While often their station I pondered;
Then chased dogs and many a winged being
Aimlessly, sincere, with vain grasps.

The natural fountain, drink
For vegetable garden and myself alike
For yellow spotted toads a home
Genesis to each bound.

Rocks and pathways that used to fly
Beneath my soles shrubs fences ditches
And the oak and cypress trees that danced nightly,
Once so near, so mighty.

A scream away still lay the hamlet:
But the house, old and eternal,
That first gave me light within the dark
Where mamma and papà resound chillingly still
Was in ruin, thorn infested, untouchable.

2.1973:
In the CCNY Snack Bar, Loving Norma

A thin scent of blue
the decor of each lid mild
noseline defying greek and english
and lips that lovely surely speak
lovely rosy temptingly magnetic

a solitary beam from the outside
strikes her parted midnight mane
defines her shoulderline
her breast part of the thigh
she's aglow

the envied-by-Venus aspect, lo!
in three seconds flat I pair her
with fair renaissance maidens and madonnas
with preraphaelite allusions and
then zoom to modern poster vixens
she's them all and then some

but for an instant an hour I muse
on her intense gaze into a book
floating on the earthy composure
the casual hesitation of the slender fingers
she's reading the *pensées*, I think

o silent music of this image divine become flesh
a few feet away from me in trance
the beauty and the wisdom
the odor and the halo of a vision
this is Norma or rather will be

yet back then there were shepherds for real
they were neither smart nor glorious
neighbors rustling and shoving
manure out of pens and stables
my family disliked mingling in their ranks
but i've noticed since
that here too in the south Bronx
and in college and in the daily news
that some adult patriarchal recognized proctor
or authority on destiny and the cosmos
preached and precluded speech vistas
and fascination with others
similar human endeavors
specifically my sister's friends
where the goatherd has become a black
and at norina's house
plastic couch covers crucifixes et al
they disparage the poles and the jews
and at mike's bar they down millers
in the dither saying them chinks or
japs aren't much or were less
not to speak of course of the latinos ...
so the poet at seven at ten fourteen or twentyone
played up and out the *familia dicta*
stupefied at first and laughing later
and crying most recently
decrying the loops and grids and thorns
in their voices and values

the restraints of that mysterious machinery
called adult politics and permissible
to which no child no poet no foreigner is allowed
recording the ruses the wounds the shame
arbitrariness artifice woeful idolatry
blatant injustice of those who
cannot properly judge and
never could recover
even if they wanted to
the sad illuminating
and not so free experience
of the real and not ideal childhood

You were elsewhere
the grass you cut was neither greener nor beyond the fence
and, face it, your visions and perversions
weren't they what was absolutely yours
trapped though they may now be, buoyed by your having

been

You were elsewhere but
from that deep somewhere I'd like now to uproot you
questioning your origins your pleasures your friendships
tugging at your idealism, your memories, your cubicle

Still I could have loved you when I was eighteen because
these late evenings when you are out on the mend
as you scan the ripples of your own many other selves
while looking at me
don't you agree
to have dreamed is to have loved
to love is yet to dream

Trying to be the other
 trying to be an other
 frenzied seeking for
 the immaculate conjunction the ultimate contraption
 come now, it's like a snowball in hell

Foxes or wolves, *bizarre iconographies* and
 unrestrained vaticinations,
 mention the cockroaches the quadratic equations
 the man on the moon no longer a joke
 is memory now a bank account in the baack with
 alibis
 is memory now a nuclear sub scouring unchecked
 the ocean floors
 is memory now that whimsical program that scrolls
 randomly
 jeering at me, you, and the entire cosmos alike?

Take a step back:
 remember the many poets
 and the few friends
 counseled by the winds
 who spoke of meaningfulness
 truth experiences
 the future...
 though they too
 wanted to
 turn back
 the hands of time

- there were utopists in your timepiece too, FM sure,
you find them in tablecloth folds
notebook leaves
and the taste of ice cream -

Take a step back, then,
but beware you can't exact1y measure the distance
if there is a past tense if there exists such a phrase
I remember

You step back out of touch and sight
and you can't love me now, not anymore,
if you dwell in the lava frozen black
if you dawdle in that circus of your mind

Now then shouldn't you reconsider
Do not back off, really,
in special ways you know I love you still
and I'd like to squander money knick knacks and

screenplays

memory of the one *unique moi*
can only be a farce
a debilitating task
a chiseled corpse

and we would have to reckon with
 the American reflections, indeed, the mirrors
 you do recall we told each other once
 everyone spins their own web
 and you too
 amidst the pauses and while breathing
 within another
 untouchable existence

and then, remember, I wrote you that
 I can only speak of myself
 of how Rome magnetically
 magmatically enveloped me
 in the plot of a vision
 an hypothesis and the incredulity
 before what some call
la storia

perhaps these are reflexes and
 metamorphoses of culture
 in short it could be a plot
 in part different and other and beyond
 the new world
 in fact
 but because of this no less
 I was about to say true

but of course the eyes have made contact
 and the words

somehow you must know
that rocks have varying hardness
and make up and undefinable colors
and way below more dense and hot and fluid
hidden like the magma is the soul

and you know already that the notion of
instantaneous total exact retrieval
is not a computer derived metaphor
and is not solely a coercive obsession
not even only a philosophical expression

and you probably know I am sure
that the clock is ultimately
only a cruel toy
pointing to us again
the dull grooves of obligation
leaving one dead pan before the passing
dropping me you the entire creation
with asynchronous hands
close together among the rocks rough
crushed and jagged
certain like memories