

# The Cataluniad

A Souvenir

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## A Souvenir

There lies in my soul most grievous a wound  
Which 'pon this day I've undertaken to sooth  
Breathe O ye Gods Holy Fire to my pen  
So mem'ry may dance with life once again!

I entered one evening 'pon the glorious stage  
Where unfolded the play that grieves e'en today  
No fault was there in that hospitable bay  
In causing the wound I sing of this day  
The night I arrived I was weary with grief  
Sick of my travels and seeking relief  
And the streets of that town were both friendly and warm  
They embraced me just as a mother her son  
There 'pon the southerly coast of warm Spain  
Where Pyrenees mount meets the sea Med Terrain

Next morning 'pon rising from Holy a sleep  
That unraveled the knots of my previous grief  
I met a man like Hamlet, a youthful fellow  
Whose words and deeds were of an age more mellow  
That day he accompanied me 'bout the town

He showed me the fountain where the water runs down

Many a peace-filled day then ensued

Of lentils and onions and garlic and soup

He rightly requested I pay my own fair

For the train to the art house of Dali near there

Soup dribbled from his lips as he laughed at our age

We were both relieved to find them the same

Though bearded we were not yet twenty-one

He worked in a factory, though he looked a king's son

'twas a glorious city with a splendid colonnade

Thoroughfares and parks where the people parade

No single cloud darkened the sky

At no time heard I the raven's coarse cry

'pon the morning we found the meeting hall troubled

By what seemed to be a furious quarrel

And there surrounded by cock-crowing men

Sat a lovely girl who'd caused all the din

"No wonder," I thought "that these men would so boast

Attempting each one to catch her the most"

The girl seated there pronounced human speech

Though she seemed like a nymph from the glade or the sea

At that time I too wished to know

The colours and sounds of her delightful soul

Yet wisdom stayed at that hour by me

Though at the sight of her hair like honey  
So I was counseled 'gainst any action  
That would reduce my face to a crowd's mere fraction  
Indeed Athene spoke not in vain  
I heeded her words and averted my gaze  
Then said I to a companion of mine  
A young man of flowing locks from the East of the Rhine  
"That beautiful nymph attracts such a following  
Adding our voices to theirs would be folly"  
And so we went down to the gull-filled bay  
Where box'd wine and laughter filled all the day.

Tis through bliss unconfined the gods addle our wits  
When leisure reclines where judgment should sit  
Tis the son unwary of his inheritance  
Who allows eye to wink at the hungry glance  
Soon is his wealth for flattery sold  
From filling friends' mouths with gifts of gold  
So slept discretion in those days of bliss  
Only to waken when judgment was missed  
'twas one day I spoke 'midst a various folk  
When I heard her laugh at the things that I spoke  
Immediately flew my resolution away  
How could I help but to look in her way?  
  
Since that bright day I've often digressed

Pond'ring the virtue of our congress  
It seemed my attempt to still my heart's brewing  
Proved now to be its object's undoing  
For shelter provided by shallow a bay  
Wrought in prudence from reason's high place  
Offered her rest from too eager a passion  
A haven preserving for her sweet compassion  
If I'd but thought of all of this then  
'twould have spared the dance of this melancholy pen!

No voice fairer than hers has been heard  
Like chimes of honey and lilting of birds  
The movement of her quick cunning glance  
So much like Athene's ocular dance  
Held my own with its warming glows  
Through delicate spectacles perched 'pon her nose

As night descended with dusky a gloom  
The city flared with a thousand bright looms  
Caught 'pon fountain's glistening spray  
Flared innumerable lights like heaven's display  
My mem'ry shines dim 'pon her youthful charm  
But I know that that night she gave me her arm  
And we went that night to a gathering room  
Which brought to my mind the African gloom  
Which dim and dusky grew thick 'bout our heads

Through which way low voices would thread  
The dark red wine lent her lips of its hue  
To which with low laugh my attention she drew  
For she asked me whether they'd lost much redness  
But none seen them redder, or so I would guess  
And she spoke of her papa away back home  
She sat 'pon his lap when she felt alone  
The bard had coloured his ode with the glow  
Of an African home where the rich rivers flow  
With a lute-like instrument with well-tuned strings  
He created from sound a fountain of dreams

As we strolled home through a cool blue night  
Now lit by slowly dwindling light  
Came the moment we all must feel  
When Time now remembered makes us quite still  
She marked in my face Aphrodite's caress  
Which dances years later with Autumn's cool airs  
Lifting the leaves from occasional drifts  
Giving motion to trees letting gold dapples drip  
She saw in my eyes the eddying mist  
Which spoke of my wish to give her a kiss  
And she saw 'twas checked by unspecified fear  
And came forth but as words to tickle the ear  
And so 'twas with words and delightful speech  
I settled for shadows of the thing I would reach

How to answer so acute observation?

'twas not by a kiss, but by foolish distraction

She waited but briefly then let it pass by

Free of the moment, not even a sigh

And before we retired from now quiet street

She sat 'pon the ground and pulled her head through her feet

She came from the land of the Menapii

Where knowledge of tongues that are spoken stands high

For those low plains lie 'midst various lands

And takes from each of their various charms

Her speech lilted with all their colourful glee

And her name was the mercy of the bumblebee

At that time came to the hostel of youths

One who believed in the nebulous truths

Of spirits and gods, he believed they were there

When you call them by name they appear from thin air

He distilled a potion of lavender strength

Which he kept in green bottles of moderate length

Of water and grapes that were dried in the sun

Imbued with water's spirit that runs

Over myriad rocks tumbling wild and free

But with ever a purpose it runs to the sea

In splashing it casts up small drops in rich spray

Silver white in the moon, golden yellow by day

Such was the spirit of Poetry's child  
Who'd left home's comfort for streets free and wild  
Walking 'pon planks and that night in the zoo  
Where wolves snapped at his heels, and we searched for the truth  
He came from an Empire over the sea  
But his sojourn in Europa had made him free

And of an evening in the comfort of home  
In the common room where all the travellers go  
I spoke with the Bee over any slight thing  
Kitchen Dutch that they speak at the place whence I came  
She sat 'pon my lap and though I quipped she was heavy  
She was but a lass, now no longer merry  
All pleasure to be so must swiftly pass by  
But I thought I could hold it all the days of my life  
She seemed to notice, but instead of dismay  
Increased her humour with lively a play  
Once in answer to my offer of help  
To move her things to the place she now dwelt  
(For she'd left the hostel just that day  
Finding a place where she now could stay)  
She replied she'd found someone able and strong  
Who'd won her regard: he helped her along  
And laughing 'pon seeing my growing confusion  
Introduced me so as to dispel my illusion  
He whom I feared stood right there by me

A frame upon wheels, or rather a trolley

One night as we strolled through the orderly streets

Glowing with light and settled in peace

I asked with restraint could I ask her a question?

She was frankly quite startled by this introduction

She rather I didn't but still I persisted

So she said ask away if so I insisted

At which utterance I opened my speech

Wishing for tact to prevent any breach

"I've often remarked thine conversation quite able

With one woman who likes to sit at thine table

And the Isle of Lesbos of which thou hast spoke

In terms quite glowing you admired that folk

In all truth and candour, and to be quite plain

I would fain know if thou art a Lesbian"

And now she laughed with merry a mirth

Enjoying the joke for all it was worth

But suddenly came more pensive a tone

She was glad that the question was not the one

She secretly feared that I would pronounce

Yet why would I know, or give so much as an ounce

To know whether or no she was closed to all men

Had I an interest I concealed just then?

And so befuddled I went up the stairs

And entered the rooms where she now lay her cares  
She shared them with a woman from the Island Green  
Where beer flows like water and the people are keen  
'twas 'neath her gaze we made our way to the room  
Where she who now led me lay her head in the gloom

The room was spare and well lit  
'pon the soft bed she made me to sit  
And laying across she placed her foot in my hand  
And laughing with ease and in a way unplanned  
She spoke with the charm of flighted word  
But I lay shocked, and though I heard  
Could barely make a coherent reply  
My wits were befuddled and my throat was dry  
And quickly perceiving I was ill at ease  
She went to the kitchen for a pot of tea  
'twas first piping hot, then rich and warm  
But it brought none of the comfort I'd known  
So seeing the right cure for my curious sore  
She showed the freedom which lay past her door

When eagle launches from precarious lair  
Perched 'pon sheer cliff in the dizzying air  
It spreads its broad wings and begins to fall  
Encompassing the wind beneath living quill  
He soon soars away with buffeted flight

He's filled with the joy of Heaven's delight  
Thus was I stooped in her breath's sweet wine  
She said she would meet me in a day's time

The following dusk merged with a veil of grey  
I went to the market with the tune of this lay  
Comforting with song a heart wounded and sore  
'midst spoons and watches and other things more  
And when night approached in that place far from home  
Travelers gathered from where they'd roamed  
Bottles were broached, there was perfumed smoke  
Of peoples and places all softly spoke  
But I sat apart from the general mirth  
In a cage of waiting, distraught in its girth  
For as time passed I grew slowly aware  
The one I expected would not appear there  
So in state benighted and with wretched display  
I emptied my pockets and put my hands on my face  
Then one spoke, he was inspired by Zeus  
'twas an older man who now spoke the truth  
He looked at me keenly and said with sharp air  
"Why sit ye yonder and in growing despair?  
This night's not for sorrow though we judge from your face  
Thou art distressed; art thou disgraced?"

Summoning my will with stumbling speech

I related the tale that night near the beach  
And concluding my song with a heart-rending sigh  
I sat in silence avoiding his eye  
But he swiftly broke in with the following words  
I have not forgotten, of their truth I'm assured  
"What!" quoth he in true surprise  
"Can it be true that your time you despise?  
By your own speech which you related just now  
New lands do beckon while you mope in this town  
I've never before - and I say this most truly -  
Delayed my steps for faint promises, and surely  
Such is this, for by your own confession  
You sit here now in self-imposed detention  
I know of her, e'en the Merciful Bee  
Her spirit is free and unchained to thee  
So tomorrow 'pon rising with rosy Dawn  
Proceed on your travels with the good heart you've known"  
But maudlin and sorry I paid him no mind  
But sought in cups the forgetting I'd find

I knew but shut door 'pon the following day  
When I went to her building so I could say  
My final farewell, though 'twas my hope  
To attain some promise or some envelope  
I knew neither that day, nor any thereafter  
I boarded the train for the land of Granada

And from the river-fed fountains of the happy moor  
To the caves of the gypsies and the resounding guitar  
Rose an echo rich with the murmuring sound  
Of the crafts and crooked streets of that fortunate town.