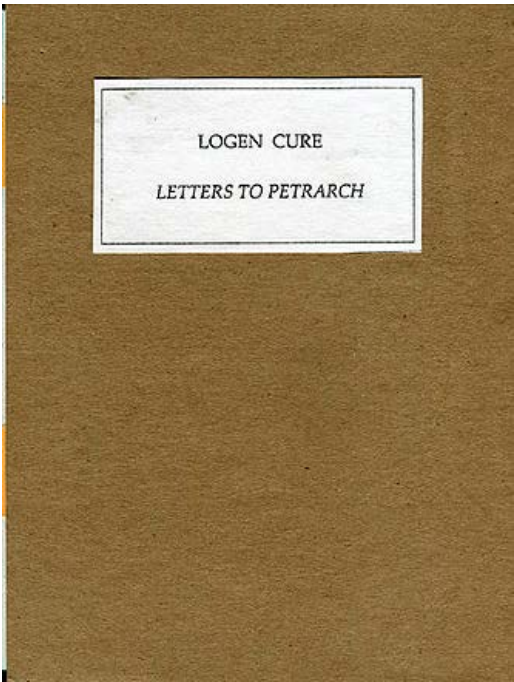




Review

Review: Letters to Petrarch by Logen Cure

Monday, July 4, 2016 Eric Cline



Letters to Petrarch

Logen Cure

Unicorn Press, Inc., 2015

Reviewed by Eric A. Cline

Poems as letters as
prayers as beauty —

Letters to Petrarch is many things, all of which contribute to its status as a paradox. It is layered; it is deep; it is more than I can grasp, even after my eighth time reading the collection from front to back. It is a masterwork of art existing as several different things at once, and succeeding on all

counts.

But it is also so simple. The language is straightforward, never convoluted. The emotions evoked within its pages are so clear and specific, and yet, paradoxically again, the chapbook retains an otherworldly air of mysterious intensity. Perhaps the most to-the-point and least contradictory aspect of it is that it will knock you off your feet. It certainly knocked me off mine.

Letters to Petrarch is constructed as a series of letters from Cure to Petrarch, the Italian Renaissance poet whose sonnet form is so revered and imitated as to have been named after him and persevered into the modern day. Petrarch's most famous work was *The Canzoniere*, a series of unrequited love poems centered around a woman named Laura. Cure's verse addresses Petrarch directly, telling him what it feels like to have actually been with Laura, and to feel affection directed back towards oneself.

The poems in the collection detail a myriad of moments shared with the beloved, including the first night shared in the same bed. Of that night, Cure writes that *"the darkness seemed expectant—/perhaps I could sense that this/was the eve of something/colossal,/like the last event that precedes/a stunning triumph/or the beginning/of a war."* Cure's invocation of war, though not the first metaphor to come to mind when pondering love, is perfect in its display of pure power. Cure's words flow so perfectly as to feel almost weightless, and yet each poem also possesses a moment where a colossal weight of human emotion strikes the reader like a cannonball. This manner of balancing extremes contributes greatly to the charming nature of the collection, as well as its strong residual impact once one has finished reading it.

The collections' poems take their titles from forms of address as used in letters (such as "Dear Sir") and canonical hours (such as "Lauds," "Compline," and "Vespers"). The use of canonical hours evokes Petrarch's devout religious nature, and conveys how deeply the narrator cared for their beloved by treating Laura as divine in nature. This divinity of subject is matched by the narrator's sense of awe in her presence, as expressed when Cure writes *"I thanked her/as if my faith mattered —/as if her decision was made/in light of my prayer."*

Cure's words carry a variety of tones, from joyous to sorrowful to pious, but a sense of being awestruck by the beloved permeates across the entire work. Cure's poems perfectly evoke the sensation of being in love, and *Letters to Petrarch* is religiously devoted to said sensation. No matter what the tone or moment in question is, Cure delivers its power through phrasing so light and airy it mimics butterflies in the stomach or the static between fingertips as they interlock for the first time. At one point in the chapbook, the narrator reflects on their own words and observes *"how I cradled what felt like/courage with my tongue."*

Letters to Petrarch consists of more than poems, letters, or prayers. It consists of the beatings of the human heart which so often elude description, and can only be captured by the most talented of lyricists. Cure is one such lyricist, and reading her work was a spiritual experience I won't soon forget.

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