



Troubled Lovers in History

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Albert Goldbarth's view of romantic or marital "relationships" is often mocking, although he sympathetically presents the hopes and the apparently inevitable conflicts and troubles that come with relationships. The poems of *Troubled Lovers in History: A Sequence of Poems* are in long poetic lines that often run-on and loose narrative structures with a number of surprising images. Goldbarth connects the contemporary relationships to a number of historical figures such as Rontgen, Marco Polo, and Monet to juxtapose past times to current ones in order to reveal the failures in relationships today.

Each section of the book deals with those troubled relationships, but the most important ones are "Troubles with Pleasant Interludes" and "More Trouble with Pleasant Interludes." Marriage is portrayed in the poems as "going to the grave contending," an unending series of petty quarrels that makes up modern marriage. Goldbarth also uses the Rontgen X ray theme in these sections. The discovery of the X ray is seen as a device by which society might nakedly look into people's lives, which becomes another source of conflict rather than union. We are "undone" by this insight, and it is "unable to light their essential privacy."

The sections on "Generations" is less interesting and less related to the central themes of the book, although it does deal with the relationships of fathers and sons. The last section "Natural History" is the weakest in the book as it uses the bizarre natural history of Pliny to reflect on troubled relationships.

Troubled Lovers in History is an amusing and relentless look at contemporary "relationships" in a series of long poems. Its use of history as a device to "measure" the failures of marriage and other relationships is revealing and often illuminating.

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