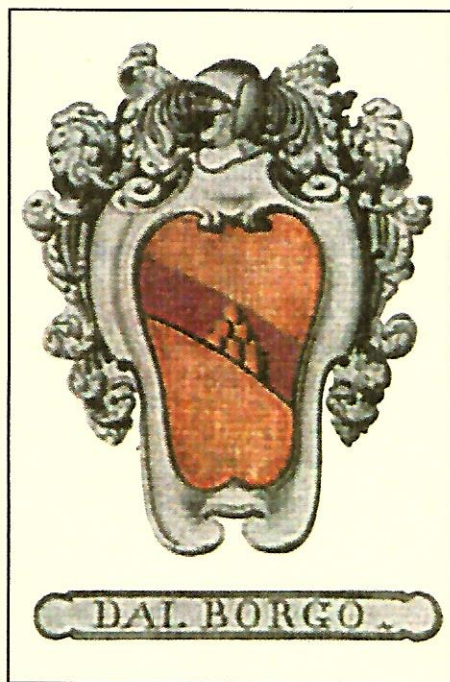


KAREN ALKALAY GUT



FLORENTINE  
DIARY

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Hotel "Aprile"  
Palazzo dal Borgo

*Dear Guest it is our pleasure to offer you this collection of poems written by Karen Alkalay Gut during her stay at the hotel Aprile in September 2003.*

*She was here for a very special event of which we were among the proud sponsors: the Israeli and Palestinian poets' meeting in Florence. A small step towards a very much longed for peace.*

*These poems will enable you to see our city through the poet's eyes, highlighting unusual aspects of Florence, and will remain with you as a reminder of your days in this unique city.*

## TRAVELLING

The moment you stop moving  
in a strange airport  
you are no one.

You listen to the voice  
in the air  
telling all who  
know to decipher –  
important information.

To you who  
cannot comprehend  
the voice blares out  
that all  
the knowledge  
you possess  
takes you  
no where.  
Not here.

## GIOTTO'S TOWER

The girl at the top of the tower  
the girl at the end  
of the 400 odd stairs  
sits  
in a glass cage  
to keep her safe  
from the few brave tourists  
who climb the 400 odd stairs  
with their great  
enthusiasm  
for the exotic  
the rare

the girl at the top of the stairs  
looks like a drawing of Beatrice  
and doesn't really care

even when I reach her  
huffing, laughing  
and suggest a prize be given  
that a woman my age  
has made it to the top  
of 400 odd stairs

only to find  
Her

## THE BLACK CAT

face grey with age  
sits on the brochures  
of the Hotel Aprile  
and warns me  
not to come near

I watch him follow the maid to the kitchen  
then back to Front Desk  
as if defending the entrance  
from unsuitable guests

Later  
at the formal rehearsal in the lobby  
the cat is absent

but when we leave  
he ascends the Florentine chair  
and sharpens his claws  
in the red cushion.

## NEAR THE DUOMO

from a taxi  
in the middle of night  
I see a girl standing  
with rich curly red hair  
just like the girl  
I saw today  
on Ghirlandaio's wall  
at Santa Maria Novella

I watch  
as intently as art  
as we wait  
by the traffic light

and she  
yawns

## CULTURAL EXCHANGE

'What is 'kippele shul'?'  
Andrea asked as we walked in  
to the reading at Santa Croce.  
And then, 'Here  
is the chapel  
by Brunelleschi  
with the cupola.'

Then below the frieze of the 'Last Supper'  
I hear for the first time  
'I explain Darwin to the Rebbe'  
in Italian.

And again  
I do not see  
the difference.

## ACADEMY

As usual  
David looks away from me  
relaxed  
as if  
he hadn't notice  
he was naked  
and I was staring

## GIANLUIGI

Gianluigi  
breathes  
through the music  
of words  
into the deep  
hollow of Santa Croce  
and Jesus above him  
whispers in the voices  
of love betrayal pain  
here is my flesh  
here is my blood

## THE READING

When i saw Hakam in the audience  
I heard my poems  
differently, coming  
another way,

and the next poem will include  
those eyes.

## DUSK

sometimes the night comes to you so swift  
it is almost a lover  
almost a wonderful  
touch of light on the back  
of you neck  
almost a whisper  
in your ear –

surprise



## IN FIESOLE

Gleaming steel and bronze curls  
dance above the fountain  
stable and changing in the eyes  
of all who see themselves

I want to see these reflections  
from all directions  
because it is  
what I have always wanted to be  
in a poem:  
A mirror of the living  
and art.

## EXHIBIT AT THE STOZZI PALACE: A CINQUAIN

Still life  
is always dead

Caravaggio reminds me

his young man enticing whoever sees  
into the wall

## PEEING AT THE UFFIZI

'Better a dirty toilet  
in a building filled with paintings  
than a clean toilet  
in a place without art,'  
a lady says  
as I make a face in the mirror  
at the stink and the dirt.

Come with me Primavera  
Venus. Madonna  
I want to show you

Where living women go

## MODERN ART AT THE PITTI

ends with  
impressionist imitators  
as if in admission that there  
is no where to go after Leonardo  
but down

## STREET FAIR 1

Yeats had it right:  
tourism orbits  
David's penis  
on aprons, underwear,  
in the marketplace as in  
the mind.

## STREET FAIR 2

Without bargaining  
I buy a gold tray  
from a man because he says  
he's Florentine even though I know  
he's from Palestine. And later  
I come back for more  
tell him I can't stay away  
because he's  
my cousin

His son  
selling  
in the next stall  
joins his father to laugh  
as soon as I walk away.

I prefer to believe  
it's because I paid full price.

## SAN MARCO'S BISHOP

lies in glass for 700 years  
like Cinderella  
though not  
for a kiss

## MEDICINA

I want to ask the apothecary  
at St Maria Novella's  
for a love potion,  
a poultice for aching tourist feet  
sleeping powder, a draught  
to doze on the plane

Instead  
I buy soap  
face cream  
deodorant

## TRAVEL SALVATIONS

Sometimes orientation is by bathroom:  
how near, convenient, clean...  
will I be permitted to dispose  
of my travels, continue in relief  
- will I be so repulsed  
that all I have consumed  
will remain with me  
until the comfort of home

**Hotel "Aprile"**  
**Palazzo dal Borgo**

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