

# *An Epithalamium*

FOR JUDITH KAZANTZIS AND IRVING WEINMAN



*Harry Mathews*

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*Collages by Marie Chaix*

I

“As a Titian sun tints dusk,  
I think: kith and kin—  
Staid aunts in satin, Dada in a sash.  
I think: haunts distant and at hand—  
A hind in an ash-stand at Usk hush,  
Kids and Uzis in Judah’s huts,  
Stand-in tusks and junk in Kansu,  
Shad and tuna in St. Kitts.

“And I think, this haunt, distant and at hand—us.

“Shun us, Judas and Satan!  
Aid us, Tati and Tintin!  
Kind Santa, add us a kiss!

“A dish and a hunk, that’s us—  
I as us, us as I.

“Shanti”

## II

“Am I a margrave in Riga?  
Am I a mavin in gaming?  
Am I an engineer in Weimar?  
Am I a G-man in a warren?”

“Were we ever in Vienna?  
In Navarre were we garnering a mirage?  
Were we imagining Ravenna?”

“Emerge, weir in a raw river,  
Raven I imagine in a ravine,  
Gravamen ever mine,  
Game I engage anew:  
I agree.

“We are a merger in nirvana.  
Magi are nearing a manger:

I am we, we are I.”

### III

“This and that is distant—  
Datsuns in Tajikistan,  
A dud shah that skis in his Hindu Kush,  
Kazakstanian hash,  
Nits in Kinshasha,

“And Sadat at Assuan is distant,  
And sad Susuki’s unjust thanks,  
And Stukas in Tunisia,  
And a Saks hat:

“Shanti

“Dust is dust

“A hand in a hand,  
A hint that didn’t hint  
And just thanks  
That knit this unit, us:

An ‘I’ and an ‘I’ that kiss.”

## IV

“Dusk waning,  
A warmer view emerging  
Weaving an unsaid image  
Engaging us in a never-never reign  
Graven in just data,  
A reigning junta that is mine and mine,  
An evergreen stand that grew with rare dint,  
A wager winning a stash that in a raw era sustains us,  
A ring naming us,  
Immersing us in manna and grave huzzahs.”

Twining wreaths with their mere names,  
 These meted verses were written  
 With treasured intimates in mind, this twain,  
 Judith and Irving, that in a mediate time returned  
 With a divine retinue, thus drawing near;  
 Venus and Athena having Judith's hands in theirs,  
 Hermes and Mars, either taking Irving's arm in his.  
 And initiating the rite Athena asked Irving,  
                   was this his mate?

And he answered:

“She is mine, this radiant sister, this urgent gamine,  
                   this sweet Guevarista singer, this migraine-saint,  
                   this Aida—*mia regina, mia Venere!*”

Then, hearing his statement, Venus gave her divine assent.  
 And Hermes assuming the rite asked Judith, was this her man?  
 And she answered:

“He is mine, this disarming giant, this ardent wag, this gin-drinking  
                   anagrammatist, this mind's emir—*ma tendresse, ma vie!*”

Then, hearing her statement, Mars gave his divine assent,  
 And in this manner Judith and Irving were married  
 And are ever married,  
 And we thus utter due and vivid thanks  
 That this new event

                  as sweet as sugared dates  
                   as warm as Haitian sun  
                   as true as their twin hearts

Has here attained the unerring end where it starts anew.



## *The Epithalamium*

The present method of composing the traditional nuptial song was invented by Georges Perec, who wrote three *Épithalames* for weddings of his friends. Its basic rule is that the letters of the poem are restricted to those of the names of the betrothed. In his last epithalamium, to reflect the merging of separate individuals into one entity, Perec added a further refinement: the opening sections use the letters of each name separately and alternately; as the poem progresses they are gradually mingled. In the present example, it is words based on each of the two sets of letter that are first combined (IV); not until the final section are letters of both names freely mixed.

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by Harry Mathews  
collages by Marie Chaix

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