

Italian Blues

CYRUS CASSELLS

I. *Della Robbia Blue*

Confession: after decades of loving you,
I'm done with artful dodges,

lust-fueled storytelling,
and brash-as-Saturday-midnight masks.

You've been a cockeyed crush, a nemesis,
and every color and feisty persona in between—

On my top-secret Lancelot's quest to impress
dear forceful, prismatic you,

accuracy has become my Camelot.
For example, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*,

delusional, always pipe-dreaming Blanche Dubois
gladly insists on pinpointing

a robe's inspiriting hue
as not lavender but "Della Robbia blue,"

"a light blue redder and deeper
than the color of forget-me-nots,"

an epiphanic, 15th century blue
the painter Luca della Robbia,

Florentine master of terra-cotta,
replicated time and again in stellar ceramics—

Regarding our silver anniversary,
it would be autumn-time perjury

or sheer hyperbole to insist
I could never manage without you;

love-maker, perennial rascal,
let me be precise

as razzle-dazzle, bull's-eye Blanche
or fiercely unerring,

diligent della Robbia:
don't let me live without you—

II. *Madonna of Telltale Blue*

Madonna del Parto
(Monterchi, Italy)

As if the blue maternity cloak
Of the luminous painting were tantamount

To a comic strip champion's thought-cloud
Or a Buddhist's river-current mantra—

In praise, at vespers in Castrabecco,
I install a passable facsimile

Of Piero della Francesca's long-prized
Monterchi madonna

Directly above my escritoire,
Linking my writer's inmost quest for meaning

To innumerable co-yearners, supplicants,
As adamant and footsore

As the gift-bestowing Magi,
Hardy sages resolute to seek and ask

Prescient Mary and the star-cloaked
Christ-to-come,

Still ensconced beneath her phenomenal,
Hallowing dress:

*Lovely virgin of myrrh and circumstance,
Madonna of telltale blue,*

*What is this new-minted marriage
Of God and flesh?*

*Tell us, when will we truly live?
When will we touch our divinity?*

About the author

Is There Room for Another Horse on Your Horse Ranch? (Four Way Books: March 2024) is Cyrus Cassells's latest volume. *Everything in Life is Resurrection: Selected Poems, 1982-2022* (TCU Press) and *Lorca to the Umpteenth Power* (3: A Taos Press) are forthcoming in 2025 and 2026. Among his honors: a Guggenheim fellowship and a Lambda Literary Award. *The World That the Shooter Left Us* was a Houstonic Book Award finalist and *The Gospel according to Wild Indigo*, a finalist for the NAACP Image Award. His two books of Catalan translations, *Still Life with Children: Selected Poems of Francesc Parcerisas* and *To The Cypress Again and Again: Tribute to Salvador Espriu*, both received the Texas Institute of Letters' biennial Soeurette Diehl Fraser Award for Best Translated Book. The 2021 Poet Laureate of Texas, Cassells is a Regents' and University Distinguished Professor of English at Texas State University.