Threshold and Teknos

Science Poetry Collaboration

The poem “I Am You” is a dialogue between a human brain and an enamored speaker, organized in interchangeable free-verse and sonnet forms. While the two structures flow together conversationally, italicized stanzas allow the reader to treat either part as an independent, introspective monologue.

The poem asserts the brain’s role as the master organ and seat of human nature, receiving inputs from every sensory system while exerting conscious and unconscious control over all other bodily structures. Within the brain’s monologue, functional characteristics of each organ are twisted into pointed jabs – waste-removing kidneys are “glorified water-filters,” while the heart’s unerring blood-pumping is “monotonous and arrogant.”

The first stanza explores human identity through the neuroscience concept of “action potentials,” coordinated surges of ions across neuronal cell membranes, as well as the “axons and dendrites” that send and receive signals to maintain a homeostatic balance by secreting hormones and regulating vital functions of heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration. Throughout the dialogue, metaphorical references to neuroanatomical structures are used to uphold the brain’s admirable complexity and elegance – for example, cushioning cerebrospinal fluid is characterized as a “grand oasis” and the thick external coating of dura mater is glorified as an “exquisite leather jacket.”

— Benjamin Cohen

I AM YOU



by Benjamin Cohen

I am the puppeteer of your earthly body,
Pulling strings at the mercy of action potentials.
I am the conductor of your syncopated rhapsody,
Axons and dendrites firing in homeostatic beat.
I am the master of your organ-ized philosophy,
Thoughts born from following orders and scripts.

Wheezing bags of banal air!
What are those membranous monstrosities
But more of my minions?
Look away from the deflated,
Oxygen-starved pair of breath-balloons and
Turn your attention to *me*!

I gaze at your form with adoration
Marveling at your profound elegance.
Not a passing and fleeting flirtation
As I notice your great intelligence.

What's that? Ah, you have it!
Not those crimson beans,
Glorified water-filters draining blood's dregs,
Dull frontiers trodden by innumerable scalpels.
Run *my* luscious ridges of sulci back through the magnet,
And take another look at the stately pixels!

Your appearance striking and electric
As I gaze upon you with love untold.
My affection might look quite eclectic
As I pore over each exquisite fold.

Excellent! Peel your eyes off the
Blinding surgical lights.
Shun that quivering pump,
Monotonous, arrogant chambers!

Contract, relax, repeat —
The oblivious motor of life
Plumbs a factory into eternity
Until it rudely resigns from my presence.
Although... I suppose this
Biomechanical abomination
Dances to *my* beat
And hears *my* silent chemical call!?

> *I had been courting with you forever*
> *Before the sensitive, cozy embrace*
> *When I stroked your flawless skin of leather*
> *And etched a permanent memory trace.*

Now you've got it! Listen to Nature's magnum opus,
Floating in a grand oasis of fluid
A comfortably cushioned cranial vault
And an exquisite leather jacket.
My rolling mountains and valleys
Encapsulate all you will ever know.

I am your past, present, and future.

I am the king your bodily subjects stoop to.

I am the vessel of your humanity.

I am you.

> *Such pristine yet blind love? Is it insane?*
> *Alas, it is not – I adore the brain,*
> *A beautiful, monstrous mess*
> *Of infinite complexity and natural opulence.*