

poetryfoundation.org

# Your Poems Will Never Go Out of Print!

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by KENNETH GOLDSMITH

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Dearest poets, the immortality of your poems that you have long desired has now been fulfilled. Your heartfelt couplets, your unique observations, your sensitive pronouncements on the fragility and fate of the human race, your high-minded aspirations to help those in need, your earnest efforts to give voice to those who have none, your trials and travails as expressed in exquisitely crafted verse, your finely rendered moral arguments, your articulated life lessons, your chiseled enjambment, your precious moments and the vulnerable bearing of your soul shall live for eternity — as ad bait.

Once you publish something on the internet, it never goes out of print. Your words are scraped and sorted, converted into keywords and used to sell. Your lust for an audience has now been granted: The machines have carefully parsed and closely read your poems more than any human reader ever will, succinctly analyzing every word, extracting the most specific interpretations possible. They are your dream readers. You used to worry that your work would be unloved and unread: fear not, for you are now popular, a poet in great demand.

Your poems are *détourned* as password code crack lexicons, document compilers and automatically harvested “knowledge” aggregators, appearing on untold numbers of machine-built blogs of the least discriminating nature; the more unique your words are, the more likely they are to appear on ad sidebars, hoping to snare consumers. Your work has never been this widely distributed, mirrored untold times.

Realms such as poetry — which we once thought of as being protected — are making themselves available to commercial processes. Our writing has eerily begun to resemble data trails, spoofing web spiders into thinking that they are records of purchasing patterns or consumer profiles instead of poems. Our subjectivity is now being scooped, coded, analyzed and distributed by tracking devices, all in hopes of increasing purchasing activity. The character of our writing has now modeled itself to the whims of shopping: modulation, constant change, camouflage, mutation, predation, sabotage, parasitism and surveillance. As our writing becomes more fluid — supercharged and impulsive — it acquires more reach, more agility, more speed and deeper market penetration. **As a result, our poems now represent the means by which consumerism**

**can continue its expansion.** Poetry as manifest destiny: our expansion knows no limits. Why be local when you can truly be global?

I know what you're thinking. You don't want any part of this. I'm going to drop a real secret on you. Shhhh... the new radicalism is paper. Right. Publish it on a printed page and no one will ever know about it. It's the perfect vehicle for terrorists, serial killers, and sensitive poets. If you don't want it to exist — and there are many reasons to want to keep things private — keep it off the web. Otherwise, close your eyes and think of England, dear.

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