

# LOG RHYTHMS



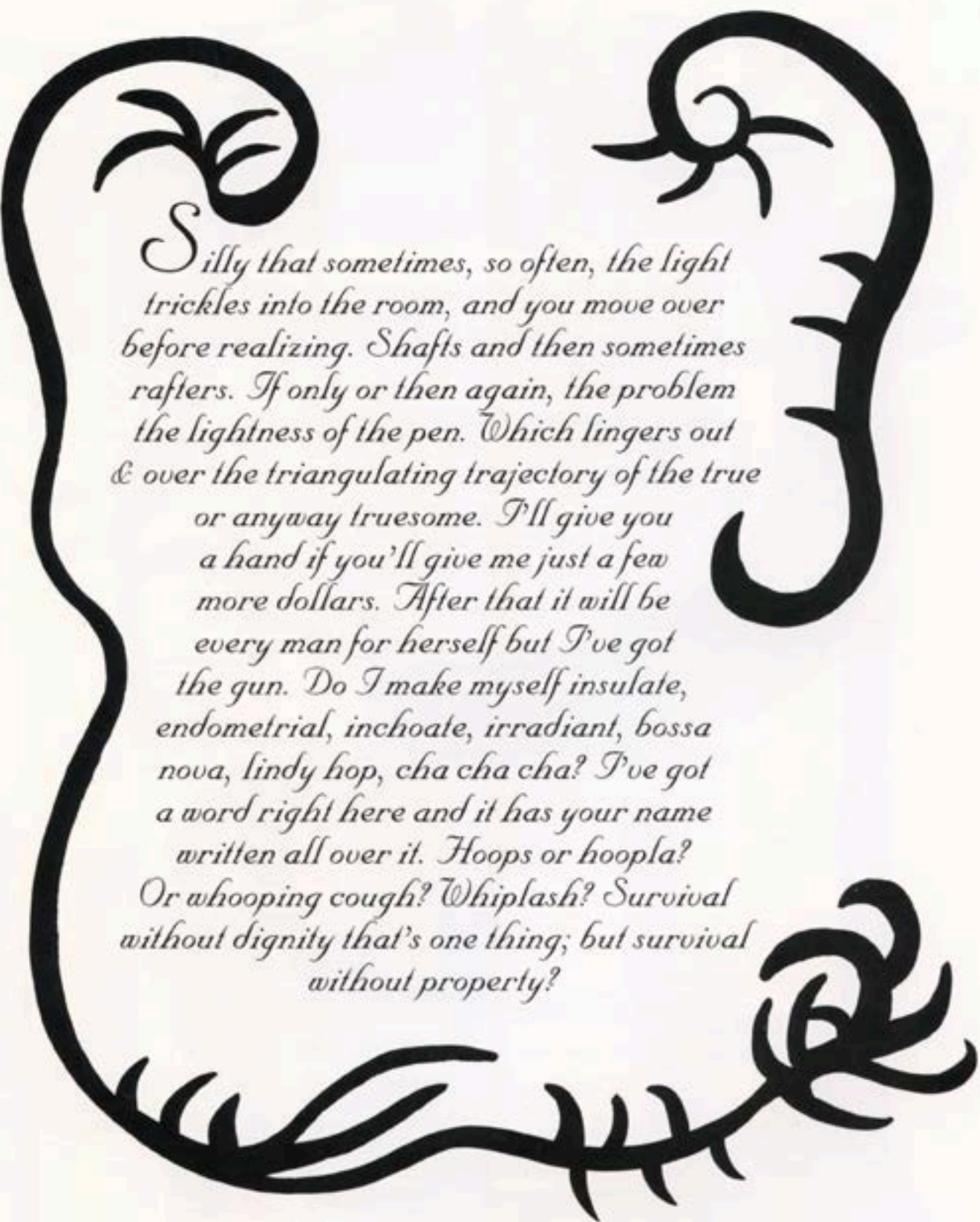
CHARLES BERNSTEIN  
AND  
SUSAN BEE




# Log Rhythms

poem by Charles Bernstein  
illustrated by Susan Bee

Granary Books  
1998




*Silly that sometimes, so often, the light  
trickles into the room, and you move over  
before realizing. Shafts and then sometimes  
rafters. If only or then again, the problem  
the lightness of the pen. Which lingers out  
& over the triangulating trajectory of the true  
or anyway truesome. I'll give you  
a hand if you'll give me just a few  
more dollars. After that it will be  
every man for herself but I've got  
the gun. Do I make myself insulate,  
endometrial, inchoate, irradiant, bossa  
nova, lindy hop, cha cha cha? I've got  
a word right here and it has your name  
written all over it. Hoops or hoopla?  
Or whooping cough? Whiplash? Survival  
without dignity that's one thing; but survival  
without property?*


A stylized black and white illustration of a woman's face and hair. The hair is large and voluminous, with a heart-shaped cutout in the center. The woman's face is on the right side, looking towards the left. Her hair has several small circles along its top edge. The heart-shaped cutout contains a block of text. Below the heart, there is a hand holding a small object, possibly a crystal or a piece of jewelry. The overall style is graphic and minimalist.

My wife she stood with a loaded gun. Who  
said that? There is no destination like  
the present & the present is no destination  
in the slightest. There's no destination  
like the thruway either but I wouldn't  
want to be on the other side. Break  
a crystal and get a broken crystal – saying's  
believing. Carried up fourteen flights  
of stairs but rolled down only ten.

**Oh, do you know the muffled man  
The ruffled man, the tussled man?  
Do you know the muffled man  
Who lives on Dreary Lane?**

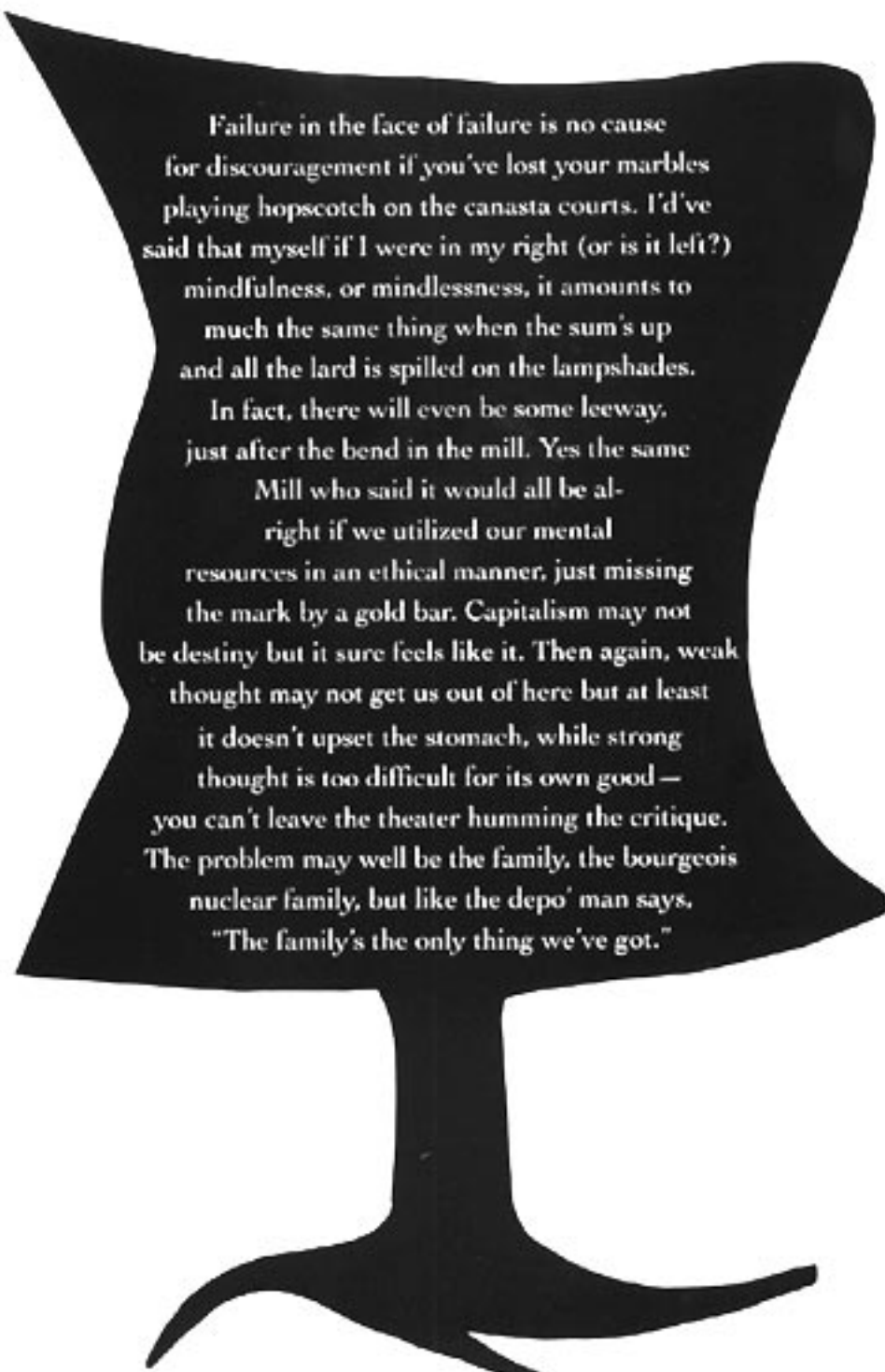


Ghosts so high you can see the sorrow fly -  
and nobody knows better for, or in spite of, it

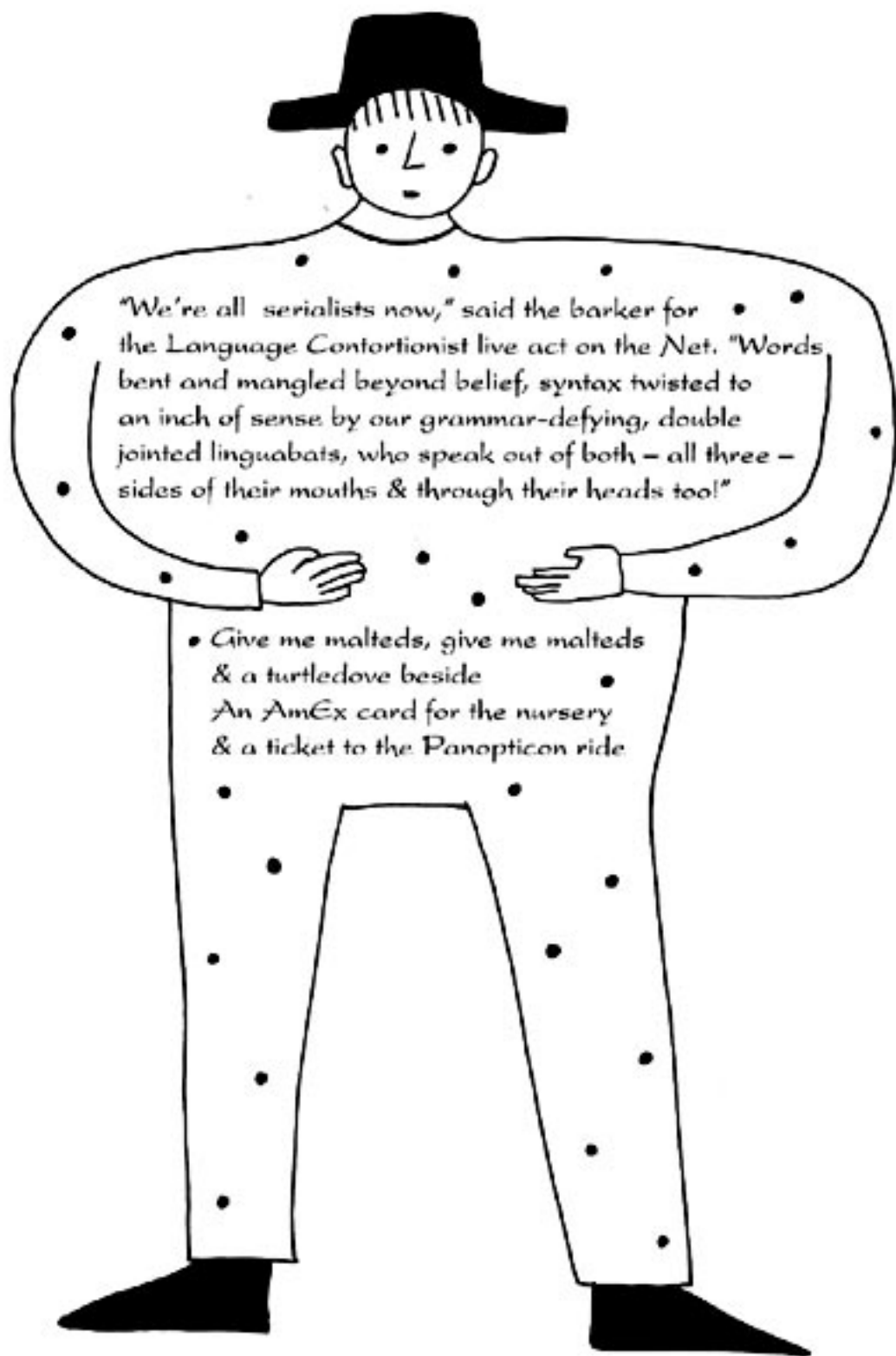


**Grill cheese, grill cheese  
Please don't make me sneeze!  
Heavens to Betsy, Hell-bent on proxies  
Don't let me be squeezed again!**



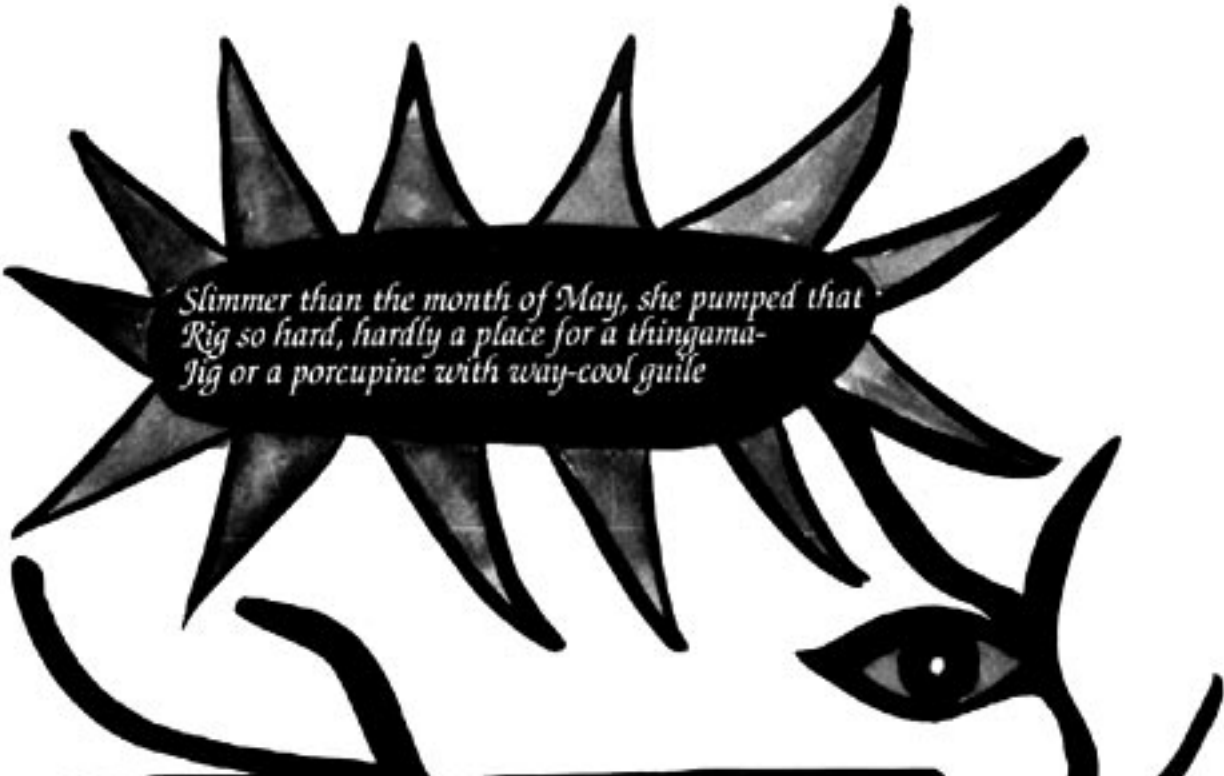


Failure in the face of failure is no cause for discouragement if you've lost your marbles playing hopscotch on the canasta courts. I'd've said that myself if I were in my right (or is it left?) mindfulness, or mindlessness, it amounts to much the same thing when the sum's up and all the lard is spilled on the lampshades. In fact, there will even be some leeway, just after the bend in the mill. Yes the same Mill who said it would all be all-right if we utilized our mental resources in an ethical manner, just missing the mark by a gold bar. Capitalism may not be destiny but it sure feels like it. Then again, weak thought may not get us out of here but at least it doesn't upset the stomach, while strong thought is too difficult for its own good — you can't leave the theater humming the critique. The problem may well be the family, the bourgeois nuclear family, but like the depo' man says, "The family's the only thing we've got."

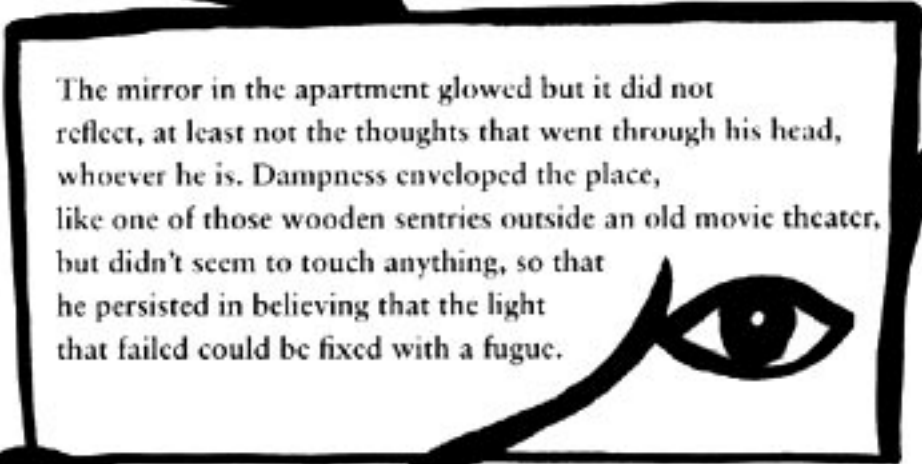


"We're all serialists now," said the barker for the Language Contortionist live act on the Net. "Words bent and mangled beyond belief, syntax twisted to an inch of sense by our grammar-defying, double jointed linguabats, who speak out of both – all three – sides of their mouths & through their heads too!"

- Give me malteds, give me malteds  
& a turtledove beside  
An AmEx card for the nursery  
& a ticket to the Panopticon ride

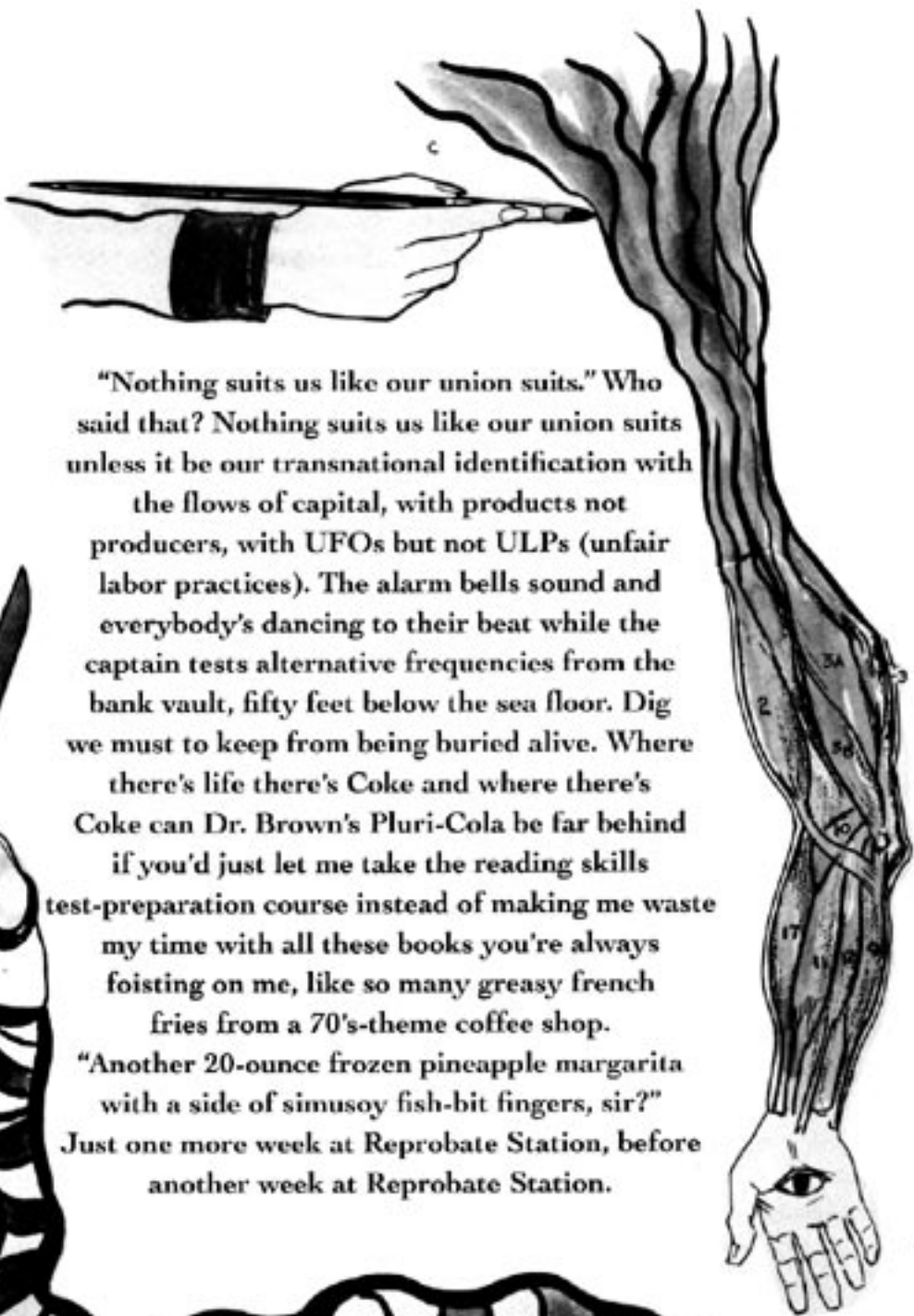


*Slimmer than the month of May, she pumped that  
Rig so hard, hardly a place for a thingama-  
jig or a porcupine with way-cool guile*



The mirror in the apartment glowed but it did not reflect, at least not the thoughts that went through his head, whoever he is. Dampness enveloped the place, like one of those wooden sentries outside an old movie theater, but didn't seem to touch anything, so that he persisted in believing that the light that failed could be fixed with a fugue.





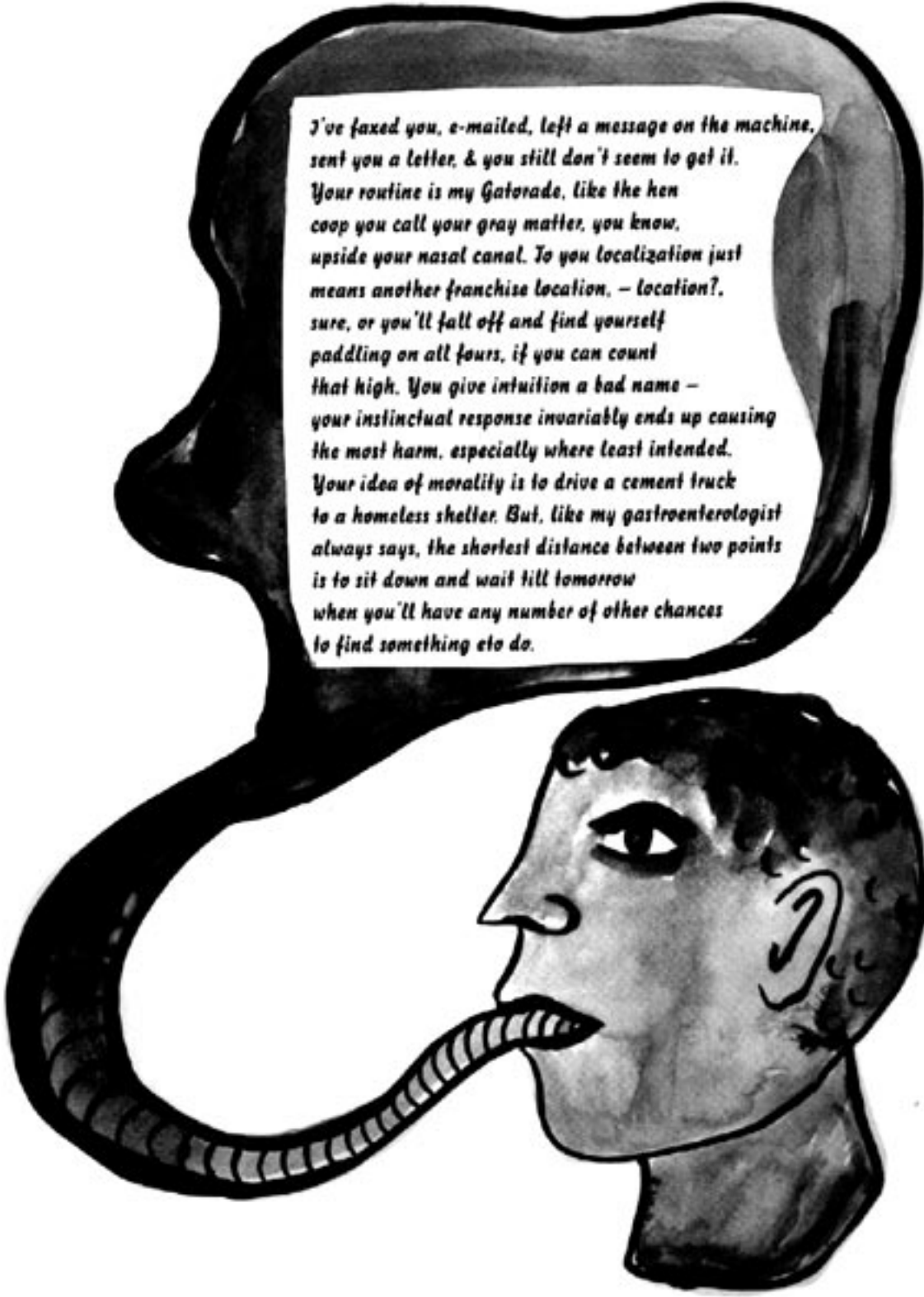
“Nothing suits us like our union suits.” Who said that? Nothing suits us like our union suits unless it be our transnational identification with

the flows of capital, with products not producers, with UFOs but not ULPs (unfair labor practices). The alarm bells sound and everybody’s dancing to their beat while the captain tests alternative frequencies from the bank vault, fifty feet below the sea floor. Dig we must to keep from being buried alive. Where there’s life there’s Coke and where there’s Coke can Dr. Brown’s Pluri-Cola be far behind


if you’d just let me take the reading skills test-preparation course instead of making me waste my time with all these books you’re always foisting on me, like so many greasy french fries from a 70’s-theme coffee shop.

“Another 20-ounce frozen pineapple margarita with a side of simusoy fish-bit fingers, sir?”

Just one more week at Reprobate Station, before another week at Reprobate Station.



*I've faxed you, e-mailed, left a message on the machine, sent you a letter, & you still don't seem to get it. Your routine is my Gatorade, like the hen coop you call your gray matter, you know, upside your nasal canal. To you localization just means another franchise location, - location?, sure, or you'll fall off and find yourself paddling on all fours, if you can count that high. You give intuition a bad name - your instinctual response invariably ends up causing the most harm, especially where least intended. Your idea of morality is to drive a cement truck to a homeless shelter. But, like my gastroenterologist always says, the shortest distance between two points is to sit down and wait till tomorrow when you'll have any number of other chances to find something eto do.*



Now let me tell you what you really mean.  
You're still not listening. And the loquacious  
wit you call logorrhea stopped licking  
before we emerged from the primordial ooze  
to what you dignify with the name species. It  
doesn't take a genius to see that if you don't  
keep the slide on the pot all the butter will  
spoil away. It doesn't take a weatherman to  
know that an ill wind needs head rest and plenty of  
reconceptualization. The stump don't work 'cause the  
loggers took the cell phone. Just because  
I have no advice to sell doesn't mean  
the buzz saw's not jammed in the baklava  
bush. At least with an infomercial you know  
where they're coming from. Just because  
redeployment had been pushed back till opportunity  
stops banging desperately at the portals –  
then get your own planet!



This is the story of the LOX and the FROWN.

You can follow along with me in your book.

You will know it is time to turn the page  
when you hear the chimes ring like this -

🔔🔔🔔🔔. One day, the **LOX** said to the **FROWN**,

"Let's buy some bagels and go to the town."

"I'm not up for that," said the **FROWN**, with a  
discouraging leer. "What do you say we just

stay here?" 🔔🔔🔔🔔 The **LOX** and the **FROWN**

had reached an impasse. 🔔🔔🔔🔔 "I know," said


the **LOX**, "let's have a conversation." "I'm not sure

we can sustain a conversation," said the **FROWN**.

"What about the good life?" said the **LOX**. "Do you

think you can lead a good life if what you do  
does not contribute to the good life for others?"

🔔🔔🔔🔔 "Depends on what you mean by good,"

said the **FROWN**, going out of his way to  
sound disinterested. "Good for whom? 

Good in what sense?" "For me, the good has

got to be the good for everyone, and in the

ideal sense," replied the **LOX**, turning red, or anyway

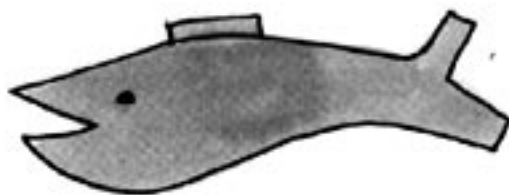
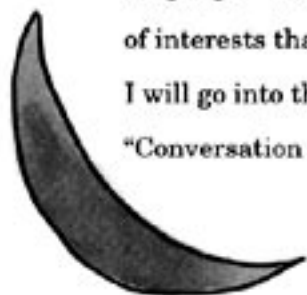
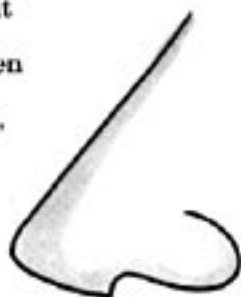




redder. ¶¶¶¶¶ “But something that is aesthetically good is not necessarily ethically good. I mean morality and art are more often at odds than not. It may be that the nature of judgment, not to say taste, is similar in aesthetics and ethics, but the ends of each is quite distinct. ¶¶¶¶¶ When



aesthetics and ethics seem to clash, said the **LOX**, “maybe it’s because we have boxed both in as separate, even conflicting. Maybe it’s morality and ethics that are at odds, and by the good we mean some way to recognize both the basis and the limits of our judgments.” ¶¶¶¶¶ “Seems to me,” said the **FROWN** in a smug tone, “that you’re putting a lot of energy into evading the fact that what’s pleasing to the tongue may be injurious to the language – that the body has a different set of interests than the body politic.” ¶¶¶¶¶ “I think I will go into the town after all,” said the **LOX** to the **FROWN**. “Conversation can get you only so far.”



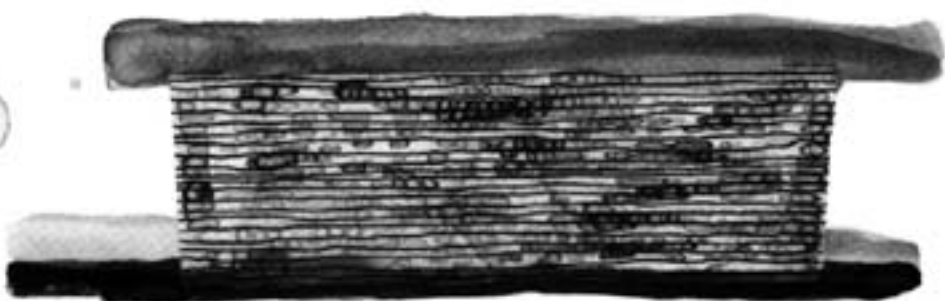
**Bob's Body Shop**  
**Bob's Bait**  
**Bob's Auto and Truck Repairs**  
**Bob's Grocers**  
**Bob's Ice Cream**  
**Bob's Variety**  
**Bob's Marine**  
**Bob's Beach Miniature Golf**  
**Bob's Billiards**  
**Bob's Boat Rental**  
**Bob's Camera and Craft**  
**Bob's Camping Equipment Co.**

**Bob's Canvas and Upholstery**  
**Bob's Construction**  
**Bob's Diner**  
**Bob's Hardware**  
**Bob's Train and Hobby Center**  
**Bob's Pool Service**  
**Bob's Garage**  
**Bob's Laundromat**  
**Bob's Log Homes**  
**Bob's Novelty**  
**Bob's Pancake House**  
**Bob's RV Park**

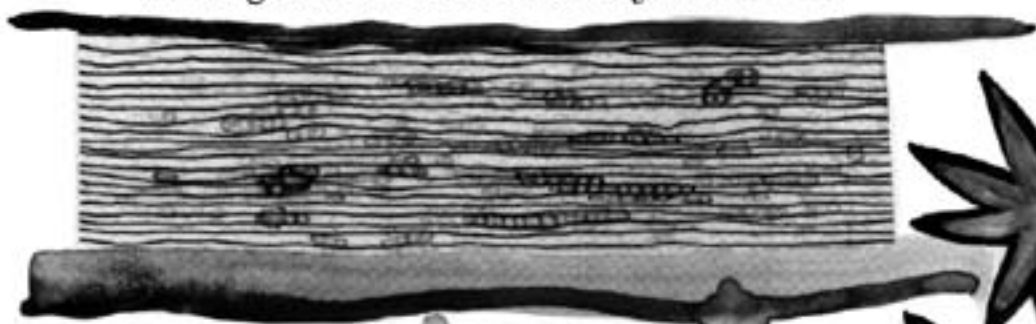
**Bob's Realty**  
**Bob's Self-Storage**  
**Bob's Sports Outlet**  
**Bob's Surf Shop**  
**Bob's Taxi Co.**  
**Bob's Motel**  
**Bob's Welding**  
**Bob's Flag and Pole Co.**  
**Bob's Gift and Garden Center**  
**Bob's Awning and Tent**

**Bob's Used Furniture and Antiques**  
**Bob's Frames**  
**Bob's Auto Parts**  
**Bob's Drywall**  
**Bob's Hauling**  
**Bob's Bungalows**  
**Bob's Bearings, Inc.**  
**Bob's Pharmacy**  
**Bob's Leather Craft**  
**Bob's Glass Doctor**

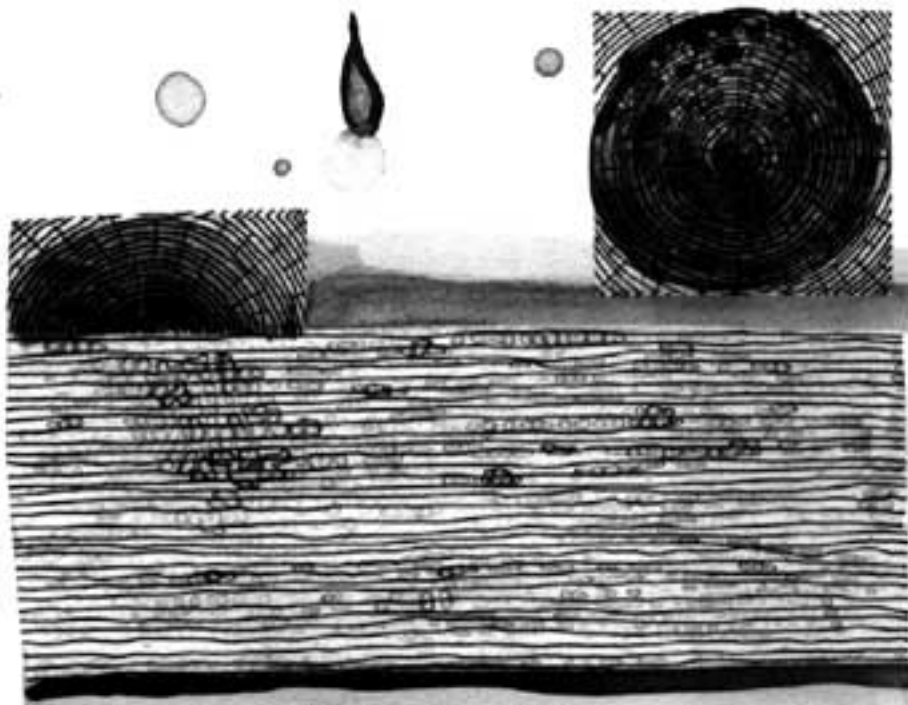
**Bob's Barber Shop**  
**Bob's Ducts**  
**Bob's Heating and Cooling**  
**Bob's Roofing and Siding**  
**Bob's Vacuum and Appliance Repair**  
**Bob's Pallets and Skids**  
**Bob's Septic and Drain**  
**Bob's Stationers**  
**Bob's Tile**



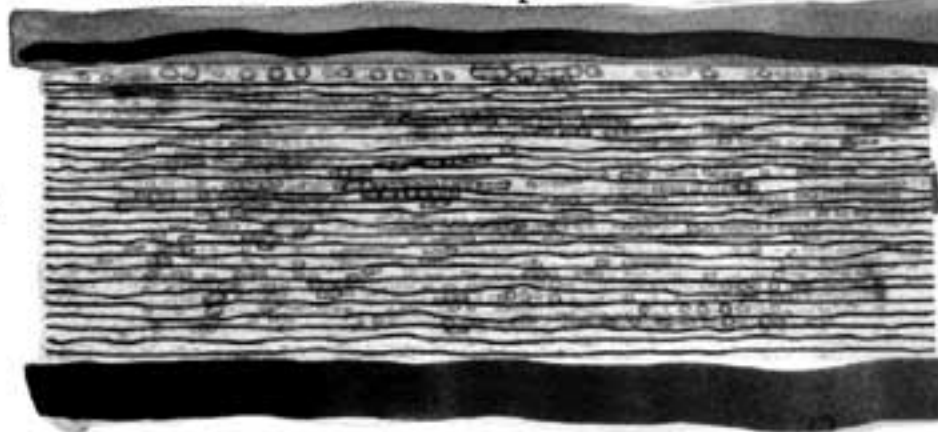
How much longer will I have to survive on  
Thomas' English Muffins and squeezeable rye?  
Do tears fall if you don't push them? And  
if you wake up in a field of macaroons,  
does that mean you've tripped on the ledge or that  
bailiffs are coming from the Argentine? I  
know that the radiance before me has no  
name and that it comes not from my  
imagination nor some place beyond. That  
each night and in the day you are suffused  
with a glow that is solid, sturdy, contained



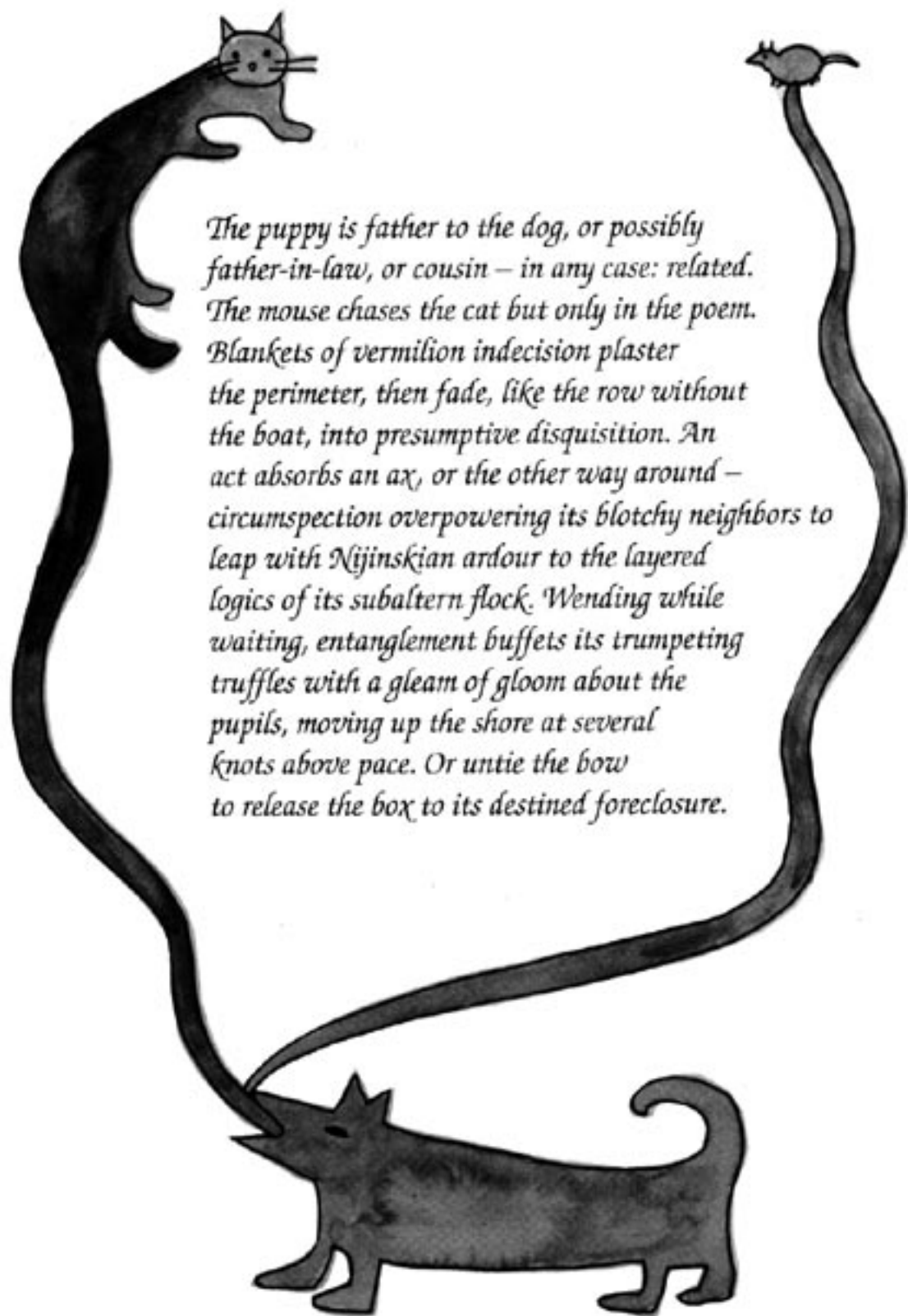




or then again like the shine of the sun at play  
in the rippling water. It's something so utterly  
ordinary, unburdened by mystique or the  
romance of intoxication, riveting without  
rivets, flush with the flesh of years. As one  
sobered into exultation or grounded to a circuit,  
or like the stew that simmers but does  
not boil, suffused passion eclipses its  
infatuated cousin, whose spiked intensities are  
consolation for, or premonitions of, that fire  
that burns but will not expire.





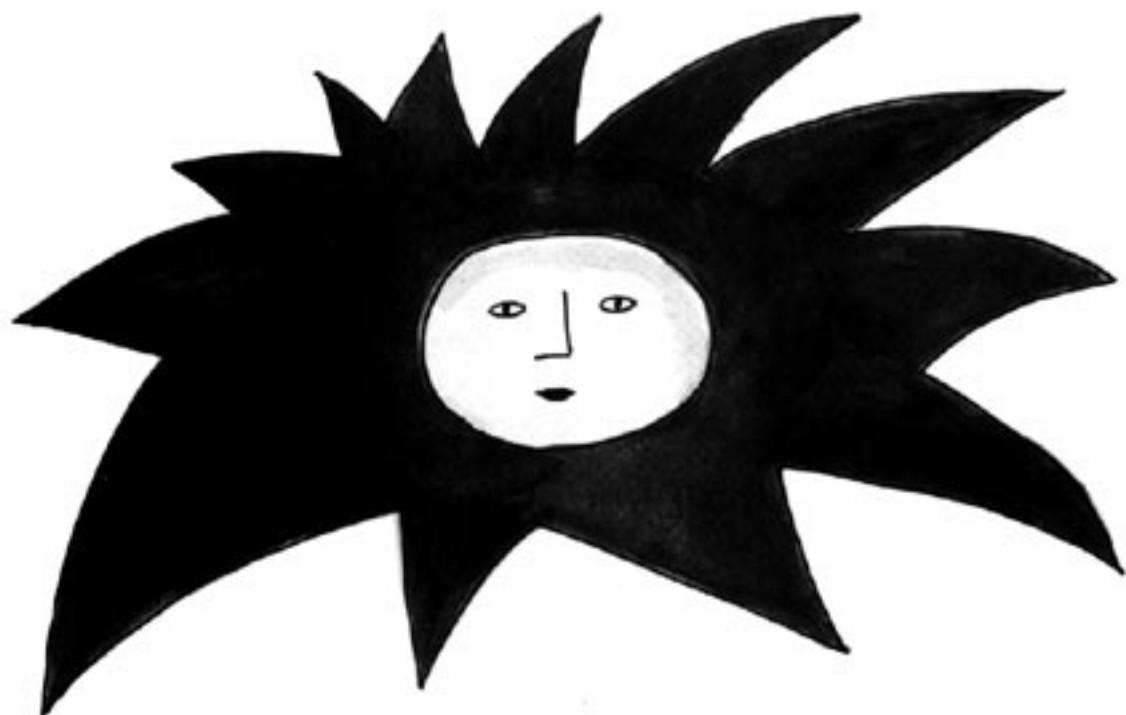


*The puppy is father to the dog, or possibly  
father-in-law, or cousin – in any case: related.  
The mouse chases the cat but only in the poem.  
Blankets of vermilion indecision plaster  
the perimeter, then fade, like the row without  
the boat, into presumptive disquisition. An  
act absorbs an ax, or the other way around –  
circumspection overpowering its blotchy neighbors to  
leap with Nijinskian ardour to the layered  
logics of its subaltern flock. Wending while  
waiting, entanglement buffets its trumpeting  
truffles with a gleam of gloom about the  
pupils, moving up the shore at several  
knots above pace. Or untie the bow  
to release the box to its destined foreclosure.*



The gift is always less than it seems:  
Commodification will never compensate  
for the empty package of our liveried lives.  
If action is always compromised then speculation is  
revving the engine before shifting to  
overdrive. Lullabies reproach, laments detract,  
the solemn songs delude – let language lead.





Where? Do not grin & fidget, let us  
go & make our widgets. The journey has  
long since dissolved into the solution, so that  
when we shake it we see only the  
disturbed sentiment that marks the abandoned  
paths. Turn off the motor to light  
the course.

© 1998 by Susan Bee and Charles Bernstein

ISBN: 1-887123-25-3

Published by Steven Clay

Granary Books, Inc.

568 Broadway, Suite 403

New York, NY 10012

The poem originally appeared in *Salt*.

*Log Rhythms* was written at Silver Bay,

New York on Lake George.

Cover photos were taken there by the author and artist.

500 copies printed on Warren's Lustru Dull.

Cover designed by Susan Bee and Philip Gallo  
and printed at the Hermetic Press.





GRANARY BOOKS

568 BROADWAY / SUITE 403 / NEW YORK 10012 USA

[www.granarybooks.com](http://www.granarybooks.com)

ISBN: 1-887-123-25-3